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COMMONWEAL

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Multiculturalism in Houston
JOHN FRANCIS BURKE

Anti-abortion racketeers ?
EDWARD McGLYNN GAFFNEY, Jr.

Turning wine into vinegar
LIZ LEIBOLD McCLOSKEY

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The moral vision of Robert Stone
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JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN on 'The Anatomy of Antiliberalism'

RAND RICHARDS COOPER on Frank Conroy

PATRICIA A. O'CONNELL reviews two books on poverty

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CORRESPONDENCE

NAFTA & vote fraud

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: As a Mexican-American knowledgeable about the poverty and suffering endured by the Mexican people, I was naturally fascinated by your editorial on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) ["Trading Up or Down?" October. 8]. Of the many I have read, I found your treatment one of the most accurate and comprehensive. You are correct, for example, in noting that Mexico does not give the high priority to protection of human rights demanded of a democracy.

The one statement in the editorial that I must question asserts that NAFTA could not only transform Mexico's third-world economy but could also "accelerate its recent experiments in political reform." Of course it could transform the economy, but the "experiments in political reform" are in practice nonexistent; they are no more than window-dressing. I know this to be so from my many relatives and friends in Mexico, including one source holding high office in the government.

Since the majority of the new "reformed electoral college" consists of members taken from the majority in Congress, that is, from members of the state party (P.R.I.), how could anyone expect that this body will ever declare that an election has been fraudulent? If this is reform, God save Mexico from more reform. As the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa said two years ago, "Mexico has the perfect dictatorship."

Three years ago (June 1, 1990), your reviewer Michael W. Foley ended his review of three books by Mexican-Americans (including one written by me) by saying: "All three illustrate the importance for Mexican-Americans of leaving the homeland behind, and the difficulty of establishing contacts of a political nature between Mexico and her sons and daughters in this country."

Since Mr. Foley wrote that, I have been trying to make such contacts. Through them I can assure you that, for instance, the most recent elections for governors of the states of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi, and Michoacan were thoroughly fraudulent. Now President Carlos Salinas de Gortari is engaged in a costly effort to see that his state-party remains in control. He is about to designate his successor and is counting on NAFTA to bolster his position.

It is, of course, up to the people of Mexico to decide what to do about another attempt at national fraud. And it is up to us here to give the best possible information about treaties and relationships.

JORGE PRIETO, M.D.

NAFTA's fatal flaws

Arlington, Va.

To the Editors: I read your editorial on NAFTA with considerable interest. It seemed balanced with respect to the loudest institutional debaters on the question, both of which, understandably, are promoting or defending their self-interest. I agree with your judgment that "NAFTA—even with its side agreements on the environment and labor—leaves much to be desired." You are correct that it "does not adequately promote the rights of Mexican workers." I also agree that the assessment of NAFTA by the Office of Technology Assessment is the most even-handed. What is astonishing to me is that after all that you could advocate ratifying NAFTA.

A year ago, during his campaign, President Bill Clinton expressed his reservations about NAFTA's environmental and labor aspects. This summer his negotiators tried to remedy the defects he found in the agreement. They succeeded partially in the environmental area but failed utterly on labor rights. As a result, the agreement now under consideration (including the supplemental texts) devotes scores of its thousand-odd pages to protection of the rights of investors and holders of intellectual property, but not one paragraph to the rights of workers. Moreover, the process for handling the three very limited kinds of labor complaints included within the purview of the supplemental agreement is almost too cumbersome to use.

A better trade agreement among the North American countries is surely possible, but it is unlikely to occur if NAFTA is approved. I do not share your implied optimism that the agreement will be managed "correctly," particularly if that management is as opaque to the advocates of the public interest as the negotiating process has been.

In my view, the best result of the current congressional review of NAFTA would be to return it to the president with suggested improvements that he could take up with his Mexican and Canadian counterparts before he makes the formal submission to Congress that triggers the fast-track legislative process.

MARTIN M. McLAUGHLIN

The writer, formerly with the United States Catholic Conference, is a consultant on food policy and development.

An analogy misleads

Jamaica, N.Y.

To the Editors: I was disturbed by your editorial on NAFTA, but it took a couple of readings to tell me why. The key as-

(Continued on page 37)

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COMMONWEAL

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Missteps

Despite the tragic deaths of eighteen American soldiers in Mogadishu last month, the United States and UN efforts in Somalia have in fact accomplished a near miracle. Except for Mogadishu, peace and relative order have been established throughout what was once a land of anarchy and horrific suffering. A million lives may have been saved. Americans have every reason to be proud of this humanitarian achievement. Outrage over the killing of American soldiers by warlord Muhammad Farrah Aidid's clansmen is understandable, but loose talk about the "meaninglessness" of the deaths of soldiers engaged in this extraordinary enterprise strikes us as misguided, even opportunistic.

To be sure, there are legitimate questions about the scope and long-term purpose of the U.S. and UN presence in Somalia. When President George Bush sent American troops to Somalia in 1992 he defined the mission in strictly humanitarian terms. The U.S. was there to see that the starving were fed, not to impose a political solution on warring Somali factions. Bush rejected the UN's request to disarm the various clans and for an extended American military commitment to help build democracy in Somalia. Whatever the limitations of Bush's policy, it was reasonably clear.

Unfortunately that has not been the case for U.S. policy under Bill Clinton. In the aftermath of the killing of twenty-four Pakistani soldiers by General Aidid's men last June, the UN mission turned from peacekeeping into a manhunt. Apparently without much deliberation, the U.S. followed the UN's lead. But Aidid's position as a clan leader in the midst of what remains a barely dormant civil war made the UN's decision to label him a criminal dubious. In taking sides in this way, no matter how justifiably, the UN entangled itself in a situation it had neither the military might nor the political will to resolve.

Clinton has candidly admitted this mistake. As the subsequent softening of the U.S.'s attitude toward Aidid indicates—we are now ready to talk with him—only a political compromise that includes the clan leader will bring an end to the turmoil in Mogadishu. Turning away from any further military entanglement in Somalia is what Clinton seems to be aiming at in simultaneously sending more troops to Somalia as a defensive measure and announcing a March 31 pull-out date for U.S. forces. This policy, however, still leaves important questions unanswered.

Can what has been achieved in Somalia be sustained without U.S. involvement at some level? Clinton's commitment to a troop pull-out suggests that the U.S. is washing its hands of Somalia. But there are dangers in doing this, especially in a world that promises to present the U.S. with many similar political and humanitarian crises. If Clinton succumbs to the temptation to all but abandon U.S. support for the operation in Somalia, the situation there may quickly revert to open warfare. That would be a triple tragedy, fueling isolationist sentiment at home,

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widespread uncertainty about American resolve abroad, and almost certain deprivation for the Somalis. As the UN's limited but nevertheless significant recent success in conducting free elections in Cambodia suggests, patient international intervention can work, even amid political violence. Much has already been achieved in Somalia, but Clinton must forcefully make the case for continued U.S. participation at some level if those gains are to be preserved. Without the U.S. leading, the UN can do little.

The same ambiguity has marked Clinton's approach to Haiti. Indeed, events in Haiti, which blindsided the administration within days of the American deaths in Somalia, appeared to be an eerie replay of Clinton's reactive approach. Once again the administration was unprepared for the violent resistance of entrenched local powers, this time the Haitian military, to the UN- and OAS-brokered political arrangement for the return of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Clinton's subsequent initiation of a renewed naval blockade of Haiti as well as the seizure of Haitian assets in the U.S. are measured. Given the history of U.S.-Latin American relations, Clinton is right not to act unilaterally, but to build on the efforts of the Organization of American States and the UN to restore democracy to Haiti.

Foreign policy in the post-cold war world will take time and much effort to work out. Mistakes will be made. But President Clinton must begin to articulate for the American people, and for the international community, a coherent American position. American foreign policy must allow for decisive action but leave room for flexibility in an uncertain international environment. Until Clinton conveys a sound grasp of such an approach, his actions will appear merely ad hoc, and as such they will not generate the kind of domestic support necessary to sustain U.S. commitments in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Without that U.S. commitment, the world will only become a more violent and unstable place and any movement toward an effective multilateralism will be stillborn.

NOTEBOOK

A DOUBLE MUGGING

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH GETS MACED

It is not often that I travel by train late at night, particularly while carrying a contraband document. And it's not often that I get mugged. In fact, the last time was over twenty years ago, in a New York City park. The woman who would later become my wife and I were strolling hand-in-hand on a Saturday evening when another couple approached, asked us for the time, and in a second had a knife in my back. Kathleen, my future wife, was carrying a week's grocery money in her purse; she fended off the female assailant and escaped. I lost my wallet, a couple of dollars, and my dignity, but came out way ahead. Anyone who had seen Kathleen in action would have snapped her up at once, and we were married a few months later.

I don't like waiting for trains—it's something about Anna Karenina, I suppose—especially on deserted platforms. So I was happy one night this September when a Staten Island Rapid Transit train arrived promptly and transported me to a parents' meeting at our son's high school. The meeting was on how to finance a college education. And I was relieved again, following the presentation, when another train idled by and got me back to my home station. The meeting had been full of gallows humor, but it had achieved its purpose: I was now prepared to sign on for a life of perpetually indentured servitude to the college of our son's choice.

To keep me company on the round trip, I had brought along an embargoed copy of Pope John Paul II's yet-to-be-released encyclical, *Veritatis splendor*. (Embargoed in this case did not mean the pope was boycotting someone or something, but that the contents of the forthcoming encyclical were not to be divulged, publicized, or quoted prior to its official publication date.) As a journalist for this biweekly, I had obtained an advance copy of the encyclical, one I was pledged to defend with my life until October 5. Unlike Kathleen, the encyclical could not protect itself, but I hadn't considered that when I took it out for the evening.

To make a long story short, soon after getting off the train, I was surrounded under a deserted underpass by four or five energetic youths who proceeded to spray me in the face with Mace. They obviously hadn't heard of the pope's encyclical on moral truths. This time there were no inquiries about the hour, just basic economics: "Is that all the money you have?" (I had given them eight singles.)

"Yes." But they thought I must be holding out on them. After all, I was no longer looking at them in the eye.

"What's in your briefcase?" one shouted, applying a second blast of Mace to my face.

"My work," I gasped, holding on tight as they tugged furiously at my blue zipper bag, a gift from the aforesaid Kathleen. I know Saint Francis and perhaps even the pope would have let them have it, but I had an officially embargoed encyclical and these guys were not going to get it. The honor of journalism demanded it.

I don't think Saint Tarsicius came into my mind then—not even the pope mentions him in the new encyclical's long disquisition on martyrdom—but the young martyr was with me that night. Tradition says that Tarsicius was stopped, searched, and beaten to death in third-century Rome for carrying a concealed host to imprisoned Christians. And thanks to Tarsicius, just then several Christians emerging from a bowling alley came to my rescue. They yelled at the fugitives who went scurrying into the night.

I felt like a skinned tomato that had been pummeled with hot pepper. Kathleen came to the Emergency Room and led me home by the hand. When my eyes cleared and I was able to get back to the encyclical, I found I understood the pope immediately when he wrote about intrinsically evil acts. I even thought about sending him my story, as the encyclical lacks examples.

But now another mugging has begun—a legal one, it's true—

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and certainly one I don't want to resist entirely. I mean the bills are coming in for my adventure: the ambulance, the Emergency Room, the doctors, and the medicine. Over $490 so far. I'm insured, thank goodness (is there a patron saint for being insured?); and the laborers are certainly worth their hire. But I find myself wishing now that in his long encyclical the pope had said a bit more about what some heterodox moralists used to call "systemic evil." Counting up the costs and consequences now, maybe I should have just let those kids have the encyclical. One glimpse of it and they might have fled in fear and trembling. PATRICK JORDAN

REPORT FROM HOUSTON

MULTICULTURALISM IS HERE

SO ENJOY IT

Multiculturalism will start a fight in an empty bar. Its extreme proponents offer little hope for constituting a common ground among different cultural groups; its extreme opponents fear that it treads upon the very ideals of Western civilization.

A lot more heat then light is shed in such polemics. And the fact is, there are undeniable cultural changes ensuing especially in such cities as Los Angeles, Miami, and Houston which have very little to do with assaults on Western civilization yet cannot be handled effectively by prevailing custom. Multiculturalism for an increasing number of Americans is not a cause, fad, or theory but a lived reality.

Houston, for instance, has been dramatically transformed by Latino and Asian immigration over the past fifteen years. In this citadel of Anglo-Saxon frontier individualism, no single ethnic or racial group now constitutes a majority. By century's end, in all likelihood, Latinos will be the largest group.

The sheer number of Latino immigrants continuing to stream into this country (the rate of which will not diminish significantly with NAFTA); their geographic proximity to both Mexico and Central America; and the spread of *Univision* and other American-based, Spanish-speaking media means the assimilation patterns experienced by European-Americans a century ago will not be replicated. If anything, California, Florida, and Texas, among other places, will increasingly be imbued with Latino culture. As a Mexican-American on a *Frontline* documentary dealing with the L.A. riots commented: "We may not overcome, but we will overwhelm."

This does not necessarily threaten the American cultural consensus. Even if one has to speak Spanish at Wendy's to place an order, one still gets a Dave Thomas burger. Much closer to the bone, however, was the furor that arose in July over a citizenship ceremony in Tucson, Arizona, which was conducted in Spanish instead of English. These new citizens simply expressed their heartfelt fidelity to this country in the most meaningful way possible. Those who would question their patriotism should note that Mexican-Americans won more medals of honor in World War II than any other ethnic group.

Immigrants should learn English, for it will remain the language of business and political power in this country. But why should they have to speak "English only" when English is not the language of choice on many streets? As Carlos Fuentes told Bill Moyers, "When you get a proposition in California to vote the English language as the official language of the state of California, this only means one thing: that English is no longer the official language of the state of California."

In the diocese of Galveston-Houston, parishes which are combinations of European-, African-, Asian-, and Latino-Americans are increasingly the norm, not the exception. Saint Jerome's Parish, where I have been facilitating multicultural relations, has Masses in Spanish, Vietnamese, and English. Although the English-speaking community (mostly European-American) founded the parish over three decades ago and remains its financial and leadership base, a quick glance at those presently being baptized, receiving First Communion, and being confirmed suggests that the parish is rapidly becoming comprised of first-generation Mexicans and Central Americans. The majority of the parish and 90 percent of the youth in religious education classes are Latino.

Given this trend, the question is not whether one will have to deal with multiple cultures, but how. Will it be in a begrudging fashion which at best tolerates the presence of "others" and otherwise begets hostility? Or will it be by creatively enabling these newer, growing communities to assume leadership roles without having to sacrifice their cultures?

Based on the latter course, over the past two years I have coordinated the Saint Jerome's Multicultural Relations Committee, comprised of members from the parish's three language communities. We have no predetermined multicultural agenda, nor do other parish committees have to obtain our *imprimatur* before dealing with the multicultural dimensions of their activities. Rather, we simply discuss how to use our respective heritages to link rather than separate ourselves.

For instance, prior to the committee's inception, the pastoral council was largely comprised of European-Americans. The difficulty was that the nomination process reflected the manners of the English-speaking community: forms were filled out by individual parishioners two to three weeks before the discernment evening. The committee modified this format to include alternative channels of communication: with the Latinos, face-to-face communication at both the Sunday Masses and the charismatic prayer group meeting near the discernment evening; with the Vietnamese, given their hierarchical orientation, consultation with their leadership council. Subsequently, more Latinos and Vietnamese have both participated in the process and served on the pastoral council.

Essentially, the committee aims for an atmosphere of openness and trust that makes multicultural coordination of parish activities easier. When people are treated with dignity, given a chance to speak in their own way, and in return reciprocate with respect for "the other," cultural barriers can be broken down,

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if not overcome. And although the Vietnamese community at Saint Jerome's will be building its own church shortly—it has had a longstanding wish to form its own parish—better that such decisions be confronted in a forum of mutual understanding than left to the rumor mill of mutual misunderstanding.

The initiatives of one parish are hardly instructive for secular political communities whose constitutive groups are much more competitive and whose common "faith" is less clear-cut. But it is noteworthy that the city of Houston has turned to the Diocese of Galveston-Houston for assistance because of the diocese's concrete experience with multiple cultures.

Rather than necessarily being opposed to a moral consensus for America, advocates of a positive multiculturalism think that all cultures can in fact contribute to this consensus. For instance, in *The Good Society*, Robert Bellah argues that John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*—a text which reconciled Catholic natural law with the American compact—was the initial volley in a series of cultural challenges: first Catholics, then the civil rights, women's, and gay movements. The point is that inclusion in the political discourse need not be at the expense of abandoning one's cultural background. As pinpointed by a *Commonweal* editorial amid the sectarian atmosphere of the 1960 presidential campaign ("Catholics and the Presidency," January 1, 1960), are we to have "a pluralistic society with a strong Protestant tradition rather than a Protestant society with a pluralistic tradition?"

Unfortunately, most of the debate over multiculturalism gets caught in an either-or: either one maintains that there has to be a universal national identity to which one must assimilate in order to be an American; or one must maintain that our cultural identities are so diverse and autonomous that the best we can do is guarantee the integrity of each enclave and abandon any notion of a substantive common good. When culture is conceptualized as a "possession," one is left with either the uniform identity of the "melting pot" or the relativist identities of "separate-but-equal" cultural enclaves. But when culture is understood as a relation between people, a "gift" to be shared with others, then one can envision a moral-political community which neither assimilates nor separates cultural groups.

If multiculturalism were indeed just the most recent academic vogue, then it might be fun to engage in polemical banter. But the rapid cultural diversification in Houston and elsewhere is very real. The question is not whether we have to deal with multiple cultures but how: seeking "unity in diversity" offers a much more constructive approach at the grassroots level then either imposing a monoculture or rending our communities and nation apart in the manner of the Balkans. *De Colores!*

JOHN FRANCIS BURKE

John Francis Burke teaches political theory and American politics at the University of Houston-Downtown.

OF SEVERAL MINDS Edward Gaffney, Jr.

ANTI-ABORTION RACKETEERS?

RICO GOES TO THE SUPREME COURT

On the first Monday in October, the Supreme Court opened its new term. As with any shift in the Court's personnel, the retirement of Justice Byron White and the appointment of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to replace him has Court watchers off and running looking for clever things to say about her. Each detail of her decisions will undoubtedly come under the intense (which is not always to say careful) scrutiny of the pundits, in order to place her conveniently into a facile category that will enable them to predict the outcome of the Court's docket.

Sometimes the pundits draw conclusions larger than the facts warrant. For example, as an advocate many years ago Ginsburg successfully litigated several equal-protection cases dealing with gender discrimination before the Court on which she now sits. It should be perfectly obvious from this and other things known about Justice Ginsburg that she will be sensitive to women's issues. But it does not necessarily follow, as *Time* magazine reports (October 4, 1993), that she will cast a decisive vote in *National Organization of Women, Inc.* v. *Scheidler*, to hold that the Racketeer-Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) may be applied to Operation Rescue for its repeated acts of civil disobedience at abortion clinics.

One does not have to agree with Operation Rescue tactics in order to reach the conclusion that the RICO law should not be expanded to sweep in the activities that Operation Rescue followers engage in. For example, I wrote a brief *amicus curiae* on behalf of several organizations that engage in social activism relating to animal rights—including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Feminists for Animal Rights—opposing the broad reading of RICO that the National Organization of Women (NOW) has urged the Court to adopt in this case.

This brief adopts no position on the underlying issue of abortion in the *Scheidler* case. Some members and supporters of these organizations strongly support broad freedom of choice for women who seek abortion, and some strongly support unborn human life as at least equal in dignity to the lives of all the animals, large and small (from whales to sea lion pups), that they seek to protect.

If abortion is not the meeting ground for these activists, what is? The answer is the fear that allowing federal courts to apply the stiff sanctions of the RICO law to acts of civil disobedience such as those engaged in by Operation Rescue could have disastrous consequences for civil liberties in this country.

To do so, say these organizations, would constitute an unwarranted excursion into political and social advocacy and dissent

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not targeted by Congress when it enacted the RICO statute. It would have a strong chilling effect on activists who would be willing to engage in acts of civil disobedience if they might otherwise bring only minor sanctions in state courts, but who would rightly think twice about violating the federal RICO statute. Social dissent, including civil disobedience, plays such an important role in shaping our society that the judiciary should not expand RICO to apply to such activity without a clear mandate from Congress to do so.

It is not that acts of civil disobedience go unpunished. On the contrary, dissenters in our republic (from the abolitionists to the suffragists to the Vietnam War protesters) have usually suffered swift and certain penalties for their conduct. But our system of federalism dictates that when the acts of civil disobedience constitute offenses under state law, federal courts should be wary of construing federal laws as the appropriate vehicle for imposing sanctions. To do so is to impinge on the proper role of the states in punishing activity that offends against the peace and dignity of their communities.

There is and there ought to be a lot of room in the law between activity that is unqualifiedly protected under the First Amendment and activity that is severely punished under a federal statute in which Congress took aim at organized crime. The reach of RICO is now well beyond groups like "the Mafia," but the Court can articulate principled limits on the use of the federal government to avoid turning the federal courts into a forum for vengeance against ideological adversaries on the burning political issues of the day.

Even if Congress were to amend RICO expressly to confer jurisdiction upon federal courts over conduct such as that complained of in the *Scheidler* case, there would still be issues of constitutional limits on such an act if it were to chill protected expression or activity. But this case does not require the Court to strike down an act of Congress for the simple reason that it does not now have such a statute before it. All that is necessary is that the Court decline to accept the invitation of NOW to read the statute as expansively as they would like the Court to do.

Since the case began six years ago, NOW has advocated that they did not need to show that the acts of the abortion protestors were motivated by economic gain. Lower federal courts have disagreed, holding that economic motivation is an essential element of a RICO claim, and dismissing the suit accordingly. Before the Supreme Court NOW is arguing that they should nonetheless be allowed to proceed with their suit because they alleged that the defendants were "profiting" from their activities.

What NOW apparently means by this claim is that Operation Rescue has received charitable donations from those who espouse their cause. But the solicitation and receipt of donations by an organization engaged in social and political advocacy should not be considered evidence of the sort of economic motivation that triggers RICO. Donations are related to an organization's activities, if at all, only incidentally. They are not the direct result of advocacy activities in the way economic gains are the direct product of traditional RICO crimes like mob extortion. Moreover, unlike enterprises clearly targeted under RICO, nonprofit organizations use their funds solely to further their programs, and may not allow those funds to inure to the benefit of those who control the organizations.

Finally, RICO should not be applied to an organization that advocates radical social and political change without differentiating members of the organization who know and approve of illegal tactics from members who are innocent of those tactics.

On this point the animal-rights activists enjoy the support of the American Civil Liberties Union, which also urged the Court—in a separate brief on behalf of neither party—to go slow before it allows RICO charges to be leveled against the abortion protestors.

There must be more to the law than the simplistic and stark choice that NOW urges in the *Scheidler* case, between fully protected conduct on the one hand and a federal felony offense with severe penalties under RICO on the other. It is hard enough for civil libertarians to sustain a coherent and vigorous defense of the voice of protest in this society, without adding the devastating effect of RICO to diminish or still that voice. If Congress really means to do that to the struggle for the soul of America, let Congress do it, and not the Court. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS Liz Leibold McCloskey

TURNING WINE INTO VINEGAR

PRE-CANA NEEDS WORK

One night this summer, my husband, Peter, and I, caught the tail end of a grown-up dinner party my parents were having with two other couples. They were swapping stories about the nuns who taught them in grade school, not an unusual conversation among Catholics of my parents' generation. The powerful influence of nuns is the kind of experience that prompts my mother-in-law to round up everyone she knows to attend a Support Our Aging Religious (SOAR) fundraising dinner. Catholics of my generation have a different bond: attending marriage preparation sessions.

At the rehearsal dinner for my cousin Jim's wedding this summer, every couple at the table had a story to tell about the Catholic church's marriage preparation requirement. When I began asking other Catholic couples, their experiences ranged from "awful," "the most ridiculous thing I've ever been through," "amusing," "enjoyable," "useful" to "we loved it," and "it was a great experience." Though people's experiences varied wildly, often depending on the priest or married couple who conducted the course, a common complaint emerged. It is the scant attention paid to the connection between family and work that most couples inevitably face.

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Although the Catholic church has had marriage preparation courses since the 1930s, their importance and required status are a fairly recent phenomenon in most dioceses. According to my parents and parents-in-law, pre-Cana was encouraged but easily bypassed in the late 1950s. But maybe they didn't miss much. One Catholic marriage preparation manual, published in the late '40s, urged couples to understand their gender roles, so that husbands could lay down the law if the wife had succumbed to the "modern" tendency to "look upon such things as cooking and sewing with a suspicious eye." At the same time, a man should marry a woman approximately his intellectual equal so that she "will be able to meet his problems with more than a blank stare on her pretty face." The section concludes with this helpful advice, "Happy the man—and already well on the way to success—who feels that his best adviser is the little woman whom he has made the queen of his home and of his heart."

Marriage has changed! Couples marrying now are generally older and often both partners have established careers by the time they marry. Childbearing is consequently being delayed, with couples waiting several more years before starting a family. In 1989, 60 percent of women with children were in the work force. In his 1981 encyclical on the family, *Familiaris consortio*, upon which contemporary Catholic marriage preparation courses are built, John Paul II welcomes efforts to promote the dignity of women, the increased attention paid to good interpersonal relationships in marriage, and women's access to "public functions." Furthermore, writes the pope, if "we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human, we must be able to harmoniously combine the maternal and family role of women with all other public roles and all other professions."

That is an issue that challenges every engaged couple: How are we going to combine family and work? What are our underlying assumptions about our roles as wife and husband, mother and father? When children come the questions become more pressing and more detailed: Is one of us going to have primary responsibility for our children and not work? Or are both of us willing to make some sacrifice in our career in order to be home more often? Or will we have full-time child care so that both of us can pursue our careers uninterrupted?

Do marriage preparation courses for Catholics prepare couples for these questions? According to at least some newly married couples, the answer is no. My cousin and cousin-in-law, at whose wedding the conversation started, were deeply disappointed with their pre-Cana sessions in Northern Virginia. First there seemed to be only one focus: "No matter what the topic of discussion—it could have been finances, in-laws, or sexuality—it always came back to Natural Family Planning." And when the question of women working outside the home was raised, the priest told them it violated natural law. Neither wife in the two couples presenting the course worked outside the home, which my cousins found "a funny message to send" since most of the engaged women had come directly from work to attend the Friday night session of the conference.

But even those who had very positive experiences with pre-Cana reported that work and its effect on their marriage were not subjects of reflection nor was what their lives and careers would look like with children. My sister, who attended an engaged encounter in Anchorage, Alaska, found the weekend helpful and appreciated the emphasis that was placed on communication between partners. But balancing family and work, especially with children, was simply never raised even though all of the women in attendance were working, and all of them assumed that they would go on working.

My experience, and that of many of the couples I know with young children, is that balancing and juggling family and work is a difficult task. My cousin and her husband, who live in New York City, are expecting their first baby, and lament the absence of people to talk with about integrating work and family: "To the degree that we're attempting to have a spiritual and God-centered family, we wish that the place we go for spiritual sustenance—the church—could provide direction in this area."

Those who are designing and evaluating marriage preparation programs in the Catholic church are aware that the face of marriage is changing. Two career couples represent just one piece of that picture. Interreligious marriages, second marriages, marriages of cohabitating couples, older marriages, and many other variables exist. It is true you can never be fully prepared for everything. And to a certain extent, the failure of these issues to be raised in pre-Cana sessions has to do with timing. When Peter and I were getting married as graduate students at tweny-three and twenty-two, the question of work and family just wasn't a pressing one. For many couples who are getting married in their late twenties and early thirties though, decisions about work and children are a little less hypothetical. In any event, the transformation of a couple to a couple with a baby, and then to a couple with children (which makes everyone say things like, "Wow, now you are really a family!") represent major turning points in a marriage. The Catholic church, despite all the energy and resources poured into marriage preparation, does not have any systematic way to convert these turning points into critical pastoral moments. Two needs seem clear: First, greater attention should be paid to the changing trends of marriage when creating marriage preparation programs; and second, the church should direct more attention to ongoing "marriage preparation" for those whose unions it has witnessed and blessed. □

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THE MORAL VISION OF ROBERT STONE

THE TRANSCENDENT IN THE MUCK OF HISTORY

JAMES FINN

Robert Stone is a highly ambitious author whose reach sometimes exceeds his grasp. (But what's a writer's heaven for?) He is an imposingly confident writer whose self-assessments, nevertheless, sometimes seem off the mark. However, on the basis of his most recent novel it is clear that he is still on a rising trajectory whose end is not yet in sight. Altogether, a most interesting case.

Stone's first novel, *Hall of Mirrors* (1967), gave notice that here was a new and original voice, marked by a distinctive sensibility. (The William Faulkner Foundation award for the best first novel of the year was the precursor of the many awards Stone's novels have received.) Between then and 1992, four other novels followed, each separated from its predecessor by a number of years and each adding, if unevenly, to Stone's stature and reputation. With this handful of novels Stone has succeeded in projecting very powerfully a vision of America, delineating his view of Americans, their present condition, and their cultural landscape. He belongs, it is clear, in the demanding tradition of those American writers who have attempted to define the contours and tap the pulse of this singular country.

The relation between the life and work of highly imaginative writers can vary remarkably. In some cases the relationship is sufficiently obscure to lend itself to highly speculative interpretation. In others, the relationship seems so clear as to be almost self-evident. Insofar as these represent polar positions, Stone is definitely closer to the second. Because Stone has been generous in disclosing major aspects of his life in interviews, articles, and talks, we can know some of what he himself thinks has helped shape his views and inform his imagination.

Stone's early years make the childhood endured by Charles Dickens appear almost normal. Born in Brooklyn in 1937, Stone was reared mostly in Manhattan by a schizophrenic mother whose husband effectively disappeared when Robert was an infant. Because she was in and out of hospitals, between the ages six and ten he was placed in an orphanage operated by the Marist brothers. After that he and his mother lived together in rooming houses and SROs (single room occupancy hotels) on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Occasionally they would travel to some place (New Mexico, Chicago) with the hope that things would be better, but invariably they landed back in New York. On one return trip, their funds were so low they slept out on a roof. Stone recalls this as a strange but not unhappy period of his life, certainly not one of deprivation. But since his mother, who served as his reference point to reality, often looked at things from an odd angle, he had a lot of sorting out to do.

The high school that Stone attended was also run by the Marists, who attempted to impart a strongly dogmatic view of Catholicism. After they and Stone developed a mutual dislike, Stone cut out, with the feeling, later revised, that he was, at sixteen, saying goodbye to religion and all that.

Although he attended New York University for about a year, he is essentially an autodidact with wide-ranging interests and, apparently, a capacious memory. A writing scholarship took

JAMES FINN *is senior editor of* Freedom Review, *the bimonthly magazine published by Freedom House.*

James Finn's critical essay on Robert Stone is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's work, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of Robert Stone have to tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? The most recently published article in the series was written by Paul Giles on Donald Barthelme (November 8, 1991).

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him to California in the early 1960s, where he soon clued in with Ken Kesey, becoming one of the Merry Pranksters and an active participant in the new and heavy drug scene based on LSD and other "mind-expanding" drugs.

Stone traveled to Antarctica in 1958 and subsequent trips took him to Vietnam as a correspondent—another drug-filled scene—and to Central America. He has also spent time in academia as a writer-in-residence ("a kind of dropout's revenge") and in Hollywood, where two of his books (*A Hall of Mirrors* and *Dog Soldiers*) were turned into major but unsatisfactory movies.

Many of these and other life experiences have found their way, transmuted, into Stone's fiction. *A Hall of Mirrors,* for example, draws heavily upon the days when he sold encyclopedias in small towns across Louisiana and worked as a census taker in the black slums of New Orleans. It is a large sprawling colorful narrative, packed with close observation and multiple incident. The people we encounter are mainly the loners, the drifters, the god-forsaken, strung-out losers who, during their bleak days on this earth, walk unsteadily along the edge of the abyss. Stone skillfully orchestrates their ups and downs, their meetings and mergings and partings even as he propels them to the phantasmagoric, apocalyptic scene that brings the story to its near conclusion. More remarkable than the structure of the book is Stone's language, already an admirably supple instrument that can pass readily from the low colloquial to elevated rhetoric, and that easily folds into the narrative quotations from or references to sources as diverse as Shakespeare, Donne, Hopkins, Dante and Yeats, Cromwell and *La Boheme*. Equally striking is Stone's ear, his dialogue ringing with complete conviction.

The narrative carries the reader from a low-keyed opening to its highly charged, fever-pitched ending, the tenor of which may be suggested by an extended quotation. Here is a leading character, speaking to the large crowd gathered for a great patriotic revival meeting.

"The American way is innocence," Reinhardt announced.... "Americans," he resumed, "our shoulders are broad and sweaty but our breath is sweet. When your American soldier fighting today drops a napalm bomb on a cluster of gibbering chinks, it's a bomb with a heart. In the heart of that bomb, mysteriously but truly present, is a fat old lady on her way to see the world's fair. This lady is as innocent as she is fat and motherly. This lady is our nation's strength. This lady's innocence if fully unleashed could defoliate every forest in the torrid zone. This lady is a whip to niggers! This lady is chinkbane. Conjure with this lady and mestizos, zambos, Croats, and all such persons simply disappear. Confronted with her, Australian abos turn to the wall and die. Latins choke on their arrogant smirks. Nips disembowel themselves, the teeming brains of gypsies turn to gum. This lady is Columbia my friends. Every time she tells her little daughter that Jesus drank carbonated grape juice—then, somewhere in the world a Jew raises quivering gray fingers to his weasely throat and falls dead.

"Patriots, there is danger. Listen to the nature of the menace. They're trying to take that fat old woman off her Greyhound Bus....The lady's bus is approaching. The fiend stirs! O horrible! O, America—horrible."

Before the novel ends, it has skewered—O horrible, Americans—northern liberals in the South, advertising, radio evangelists, corrupt politicians, strident anticommunism, ignorant patriotism, racism, conspiracy kooks, militarism, and the American dream. A powerful vision but not a pretty one. Stone devoted five years to the writing of his first novel and says he put into it "everything I had experienced, felt, or suspected." This is easy to believe. As impressive as the book is, it incorporates simply too much, the incremental value of successive scenes and incidents often decreasing in effect as they mount in number.

Dog Soldiers (1974), Stone's second novel, equally large in ambition, is more controlled in execution. Its overall story line is cleaner, less cluttered. As a consequence, Stone's esthetic intent is more nearly congruent with his moral vision. With this book, his particular vision, which will also inform his later books, becomes clearer. In the opening paragraphs of *A Hall of Mirrors* we were briefly introduced to a young, naive, Midwestern Bible salesman, dressed in "a dark ministerial suit and an old man's gray fedora," whose company has transported him to alien Southern states after filling his head with thoughts of good territories, commissions, high profits, and a memorized sales pitch. This note of religion tied to misplaced hope, false entrepreneurship, and cynicism recurs throughout the book.

The first few pages of *Dog Soldiers* introduces the reader to Converse, a "journalist of sorts," in Saigon who falls into conversation with a middle-aged American lady. He learns that

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she has spent fourteen years in Nguc Linh Province ("We call it God's country. It's sort of a joke.") as a missionary. Their talk is of religion, and her parting comment is an admonitory assertion: "Satan is very powerful here." "Yes," Converse responds. "He would be." From there Converse goes to a drug scene. In uncertainty, unease, and distrust, and with a lack of experience, he makes a deal to help smuggle a cache of heroin into the States. The trail of the heroin leads to a mixed bag of people who are eager to get their hands on it and who show convincingly that they are prepared to do whatever is necessary to get their way. At a former love-and-peace compound set in high, forested mountains there is a final showdown, a drawn-out, violent, bloody confrontation, reminiscent to Converse of the war in Vietnam.

There are some obvious similarities with *A Hall of Mirrors*: indulgence in heavy drugs, a confusion of reality and hallucinations, almost derelict characters, fast-paced action, and a violent resolution. But the Vietnam War that was background in the first novel is here brought forward. This work might well have been subtitled "Bringing Vietnam Home." Violence and drugs in Vietnam are directly related to drugs and violence in the States. Integral to the novel is the problem posed to Converse and others by the U.S. presence in Vietnam. "We didn't know who we were until we got here," he says. "We thought we were something else." The story of Converse and those whose lives he touches provides one response to the question of who "we" are.

Books discussed in this essay

A Hall of Mirrors, *Penguin, $7.95, 411 pp.*
Dog Soldiers, *Penguin, $7.95, 342 pp.*
A Flag for Sunrise, *Ballantine, $3.95, 439 pp.*
Children of Light, *Ballantine, $4.95, 256 pp.*
Outerbridge Reach, *Ticknor & Fields, $21.95, 409 pp.*

As a correspondent, Converse deliberately writes about the conflict in a way that will allow his readers to infer moral objections to particular atrocities, even as he grows uncertain about his own response. Yet he muses: "Everyone must [feel these things] or the value of human life would decline. It was important that the value of human life not decline" The value of human life, tested in Vietnam, is tested again in the States. "You can figure," Converse is told, "your troubles started over in Nam."

Stone's characters, their lives frequently reduced to a desperate and elemental level, are driven to cope with basic questions of existence. These existential questions are, in *Dog Soldiers*, frequently placed in a religious context, where the concepts of good and evil are meaningful and where their possible incarnation in particular people is believable. But the answers remain ever elusive. Much of the undeniable strength of

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— ***Bridging the Gap: Religion and the News Media***

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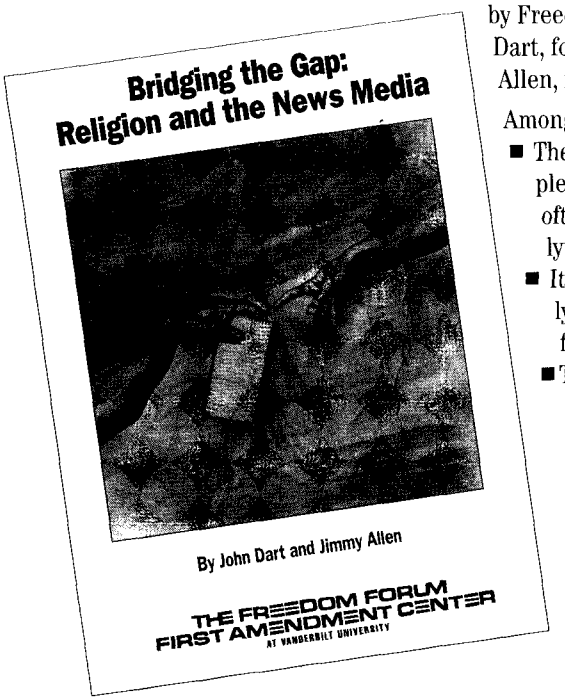

Among the findings of the report:

- The study is critical of the press for not giving adequate attention to the complex and emotional subject of religion and also faults organized religion for often resorting to "media bashing" and preferring publicity over probing, analytic coverage.
- It documents a "wide chasm" between "two alien cultures...one rooted largely in a search for facts and the other grounded in a discovery of faith beyond fact."
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the novel lies in the skill with which Stone blends low life and high matters, and draws the reader into the deeply imagined space they occupy.

With these two novels Stone stamped his signature on his chosen narrative form and established what are now its recognizable characteristics.They are evident in *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981), which equals if it does not surpass its predecessor. It is set primarily in the Central American country of Tecan where a revolution is brewing. A large number of people with quite different backgrounds and interest are to be caught up in the threatening conflict: the missionaries, Father Egan, whose faith is moribund, and Sister Justin Feeney, who is nervously troubled but sympathetic to the revolution; the vile lieutenant Campos; the American anthropologist Frank Holliwell, a former CIA agent in Vietnam; the unstable, violent, sleazy addict Pablo Tabor; the renowned writer Oscar Ocampo, now sexually bent and an informer for the CIA; Xavier Godoy, a Tecanecan priest with revolutionary leanings; the Callahans, a restless, perverse American couple who smuggle dope; Tom Zecca of the U.S. Embassy in Tecan and his wife Marie; a mysterious Mr. Heath; Naftali, a rich suicidal Indian; and a number of subsidiary others.

Stone introduces these characters on different lines of action, one whole set making their entrance one quarter of the way into the novel. These lines intersect, however, in scenes marked by heavy booze and drugs, suicide, murder, conspiracy, treachery, torture, varied child mutilations, self-questioning, self-deception, and self-discernment. After this list, it may seem incongruous to add that there are also scenes of considerable comic effect. (The scene in which a drunken Holliwell delivers his scheduled Tecan speech to a gradually hostile audience is oddly reminiscent of the antic scene in Greene's *The Third Man* in which—because of a mix-up—an American writer of Westerns is pressed to give a lecture in Vienna to an audience that believes him to be a highly regarded contemporary writer.)

The Vietnam debacle is invoked as an augury of the role of the U.S. in the affairs of Central America and, particularly, the potential revolution in Tecan. A number of different views are noted and probed:

Oscar Ocampo: "We're all whores here. Because of you. I mean," he explained, "because of the U.S."

Marie Zecca: "It's not all one thing or the other, you know....It's not us being the bad guys all the time. Only assholes think like that. Pious assholes."

Holliwell: "Do you expect to conduct your career in one American-sponsored shithole after another, partying with their ruling class, advising their conscripts in counterinsurgency and overseeing their armaments, and not compromising your honor? Because that sounds very tricky to me."

Sister Justin: "Everyone, every mother and child on the coast was in his [Campos's] hands, living and dying through his sufferance. The torture and murder of children was something more important than even the establishment of revolution, surely. But was it not all of a piece—Campos on the coast, the president in his mortar-proof palace in the capital, the American interests that kept everything in place?"

It is in this climate of uncertainty about and distrust of U.S. policies in Central America that the characters work out their destinies. For the novel is not an abstract political tract, but an incisive rendering of different kinds of people who are drawn into the vortex of the gathering political storm. Further, they—and the reader—are led to contemplate their fate in a context larger than the revolution. Faith, belief, and commitment are terms that apply to the revolution, but also to a realm that transcends quotidian life and politics. Again, a few quotations will indicate how different characters express such awareness, even if inchoately:

Father Egan and Sister Justin: "Interesting my orthodoxy should make any difference to you. Surely you don't believe?"

"I can't answer your question."

"Well," Egan said, "you're supposed to answer it every day."

The inarticulate Pablo and a bartender: "What is the use of me?"

"Da use of you, mon? Same as *everbody*. Put one foot to front of de other. Match de dolluh wif de day."

"That's all?...Don't you think everybody got some special purpose?"

Holliwell: "It would be strange to see such Catholics," he thought. "It would be strange to see people who believed in things, and acted in the world according to what they believed. It would be different. Like old times."

Campos and Egan: "I am not an animal," Campos said. "I believe there is a spiritual force. I believe in life after death."

"Yes, yes, of course."

In context these exchanges resonate, they reflect back and forth on each other. So too, do reflections that touch the inner life, the core of the person. Pablo broods about Deedee Callahan: "What he wanted, he realized, was to fuck and to kill her. The realization made him even gloomier because he believed that such impulses were particular to him alone. It touched his self-regard." And Holliwell, an honorable man, admires and is attracted to various aspects of Sister Justin: "...she was a challenge and a provocation to the likes of Holliwell. The impulse stripped down was to love her or destroy her. Stripped further it was towards both these ends, to subsume her in flesh and spirit. It was predatory." These impulses both unite and separate Pablo and Holliwell, and the reader is left to parse these yearnings and to reflect on how they work themselves out in the ensuing action.

Taken together, these observations on the personal, the inner life, place in perspective the revolution, U.S. policy in Tecan, and those who are drawn into the clash between the two.

Stone is a risk-taker and it is in the nature of risk that one does not always succeed. With *Children of Light* (1986), Stone did not succeed, at least not completely. Based on his experience in Hollywood, his send-up of Tinseltown has strong scenes, comic scenes, near-tragic scenes, but they will fail to engage many readers. His previous novels open on a relatively quiet note and entice the reader into the disquieting world

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that is then disclosed. *Children of Light* immediately thrusts the reader into an uncongenial, druggy atmosphere, and the less he responds to it the less likely he is to become concerned about those who are at home in it, most particularly the addicted screenwriter and the schizophrenic actress around whom most of the plot revolves.

With *Outerbridge Reach* (1992), Stone made a departure of sorts. Owen Browne, a veteran of Vietnam combat and a devoted husband and father, is a relatively square citizen. We soon learn, however, that he is stirred by some "obscure guilt" and disturbed by private discomforts. An odd series of incidents present him with the challenge to sail, single-handed, in a round-the-world race. In spite of forebodings which he shares with his wife, Anne, he accepts the challenge. Enter Ron Strickland, cynical and corrupt, to whom, in a separate line of action, we have been introduced as he is completing a documentary film in Central America. Hired to make a documentary based on the round-the-world race, he enlists the help of Anne, whom he gradually seduces. In alternating scenes, we follow the fortunes of Browne on the water and of Strickland and Anne back home. As he realizes he cannot win, Browne is subjected to extreme pressures, physical, mental, and spiritual. He gradually realizes that his boat, for which he had written cheerleader advertising copy, is a piece of decomposing plastic. His only distractions from his increasingly desperate plight are his thoughts and a missionary radio station that dramatizes stories from the Bible. He is tempted to claim the race and the prize by deception.

"Another man might have done it—have taken the prize and spent the rest of his life in secret laughter. God, he thought, it's truth I love and always have....What a misunderstanding it had all been. He could no more take a prize by subterfuge than he could sail to the white port of his dreams.

"So it had been in the war. Things had turned out strangely. The order of battle, the hamlet evaluation reports, the Rules of Engagement, were dreams. Truth had been a barely visible shimmer...."

Anne's trials are, in their own way, almost as severe as she is forced to reevaluate her past, her present betrayal, and an uncertain future. The final scenes of the book, both on land and sea, are harrowing as Anne and Browne recognize and greet the fate they have helped prepare for themselves.

Stone has said that he writes good prose, and that he does. His language is a gift and an attainment, the glory and strength of his novels. It charges the story, propelling the reader into the most violent action even as it invites reflection on that action. It can draw on sensual imagery and evoke the most delicate or the most sinister atmosphere. (It is all the more disappointing to encounter the few faults that mar some passages. For example, Stone regularly confuses an adverbial form with the predicate adjective in such phrases as "the flowers smelled beautifully," "the sex had been poorly," and "he felt differently." He misuses "fulsome" as it is frequently misused instead of using it correctly to mean excessively offensive. In context, "fulsome clouds" makes little sense. He is capable of describing a restaurant as being "mellifluent with Vivaldi," which

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will not do, and of writing in a crucial passage that "Everything seemed obviated in its plainsong," which is questionable at best.)

War and references to war are, it seems, an inevitable part of Stone's stories. He has seen and felt and imagined what war can do, and has reflected on what part it plays in the American experience. But the views he has expressed about this country, particularly in its foreign ventures, seem time-bound by the Vietnam experience and recent Central American conflicts. They seem highly familiar, even conventional. He says that he does not believe that the course the U.S. has trod is simply some horror story of racism and murder. Nevertheless, in a reference to Central America he can assert, "we have incurred a blood debt, and it *is* coming up for payment." Accepting his premise for the nonce, it would be interesting to learn who or what country he thinks is going to attempt to collect on that debt. We live in a world, after all, in which even Vietnam is trying to entice U.S. interests to return. Of Ronald Reagan, Stone has said that only his charm is authentic. "Otherwise he's always been the agent of someone else's agenda." This assertion is demonstrably false.

A legacy of the '60s in which he was shaping his political outlook, Stone's thoughts on the role of America abroad are notable neither for originality nor acuity, but only for his imaginative possession of them. His critical views of U.S. foreign policies are not outrageous or simple-minded as are those of Oliver Stone nor wooden and predictable as were those of Graham Greene, but they remain, in spite of his vigorous appropriation of them, a weak pillar in the architechtonics of his work.

V. S. Pritchett has said of Stone that "he should stifle his tendency toward godly musings and carryings on and let his comic urge go where it will." Pritchett is a wise and penetrating critic, but with the first part of his advice he has, I think, gone off the rails. One could have given the same advice to Dostoevsky, I believe, with as much effect. Stone has given a good deal of public testimony that he takes very seriously the question of God's presence—or absence—in the world. He frequently refers to the influence of his early Catholic schooling, has said that it's hard to ignore religion "when you mess with acid," and he knows these concerns distinguish him from most other American novelists today. "There are no writers I'm aware of who are doing the same sort of thing I'm doing because I take seriously questions that the culture has largely obviated. In a sense, I'm a theologian. And so far as I know the only one." The skepticism "that led me out of religious belief also leads me out of secular complacency."

These concerns do not make him unique among American writers—as he seems to think—but they do place him in a small and special group. His most deeply moving scenes occur when, against a sense of the possibly transcendent, his characters act in such a way that it raises questions about their inner identity, their true self. ("What is the use of me?") This has nothing to do with the "enrich your inner life, make money, and discover God" pitch, and everything to do with locating the self in the universe. It is a universe in which God may be absent but evil is almost palpable. "Satan is very powerful here." Like François Mauriac, Stone could say of himself, "I am a metaphysician of the concrete."

A moral vision as intense as Stone's can be communicated artistically only if it is fused with techniques equal to it. At his best, Stone achieves that fusion, technique and vision, style and substance, becoming one. He remains one of the few American novelists whose next work a serious reader can anticipate with high and confident expectations. □

SCREEN

ENTRAPMENT

SCORSESE MEETS WHARTON

There it is, in the same suburban multiplex that is showing *Warlock II: The Armageddon*, the John Woo-Jean-Claude Van Damme killfest, *Hard Target*, and that leftover summer fluff, *Sleepless in Seattle*. There it is, using its two-hour-plus running time to explore the refined sensibilities of lovers stifled by the rigorous social code of upper-class New York in the 1870s, while in the adjoining theaters, behind walls so thin you can hear the gunfire and the shrieks and the thuds, Stallone and Van Damme and Bruce Willis pound their enemies to pulp.

"It," of course, is Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, as brought to the screen by Martin Scorsese and (in an access of courage or insanity) given mass release by Columbia. My fear was that Scorsese would justify the wide distribution all too handily. He is the greatest living American film director, but it's only the quality of his work that sets it apart from that of most of his peers, not its essential nature. For, like his peers, Scorsese is a filmmaker of sensation, not sensibility. Wouldn't Scorsese, however much craft he put into this project, coarsen this novel's texture?

The first fifteen minutes threatened to justify my fears. Setting the scene, Scorsese's camera seems to wallow in the luxury of Wharton's *bon ton*: the quantity of food, the elegance of the place settings, and the vastness of the brownstone interiors. Now, it's true that milieu must be defined by physical detail and Wharton's people are certainly the slaves of their own accessories. But wasn't Scorsese overdoing it? Didn't his hyperthyroid cinematics distance us from the settings and characters instead of making us intimate with them? When would this travelogue into the past cease and the drama begin?

And then it did begin. And continued with a sort of murmuring boldness that was amazing after its blaring beginning.

For me, the ignition was a snub to the heroine. The Countess Ellen Olenska, born and bred a New Yorker, but married into the Polish nobility, has fled Europe and her disastrous marriage and taken shelter with her relatives. Her family tries to give a welcoming dinner party for her, but—the gentry disapproving in advance of her contemplated divorce—each in-

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vitation is returned with regrets. Scorsese composes a close-up of Ellen, looking like a slapped child, and then reddens the shot until she is obliterated. It's a bold yet complicated stroke. We may associate red with anger or at least passion, but Ellen is not given to rage nor is the expression on her face anything but stricken. Yet the color is right, for it expresses not Ellen's emotions but the vicious societal animosity underlying the cold societal snub. And the cinematic erasure corroborates what the narrator (Joanne Woodward) tells us about this society's rejections serving to obliterate individuals who do not conform. Here, and throughout the rest of the movie, Scorsese's accomplishment is to use the resources of his medium to depict the currents under surface events.

Those events constitute a very simple plot about two very complicated people inching toward a love affair that never takes place. Newland Archer, who has never questioned his society's ethos, finds himself attracted to Ellen Olenska just when he has announced his engagement to May Welland, a seemingly docile product of that society. The first half of the story dramatizes his increasing attachment to this instinctive and stylish nonconformist until his fiancée inadvertently calls his honor to account. Since he cannot conceive of himself hurting May, and since the countess herself declares that she can love him only if he remains the sort of man who does not hurt the May Wellands of the world, he breaks with Ellen and marries his betrothed. The narrative's second half shows Archer struggling desperately against his persisting love for

the countess, finally reaching the point where he must leave his wife and affront, even break from, his New York matrix. But then May intervenes again, this time deliberately and even (under her placid exterior) ruthlessly to keep her man beside her, and their place in society intact.

Scorsese and his scriptwriter, Jay Cocks, lay out this story faithfully and, for the most part, lucidly. Their few alterations

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are for the sake of momentum, not inflation. For instance, by lifting Olenska's disparaging remarks about American high society aping European manners from the novel's last half and inserting them into her first encounter with Archer, the adaptors prepare us for Ellen's later difficulties. The one major fault of the script occurs near midpoint, when May expresses suspicion of Newland's previous involvement with "a married woman." In the book, this old flame was identified by name and clearly placed in relation to Archer's past, but since she's never shown or even named on screen, audience members who haven't read the book may assume that May is being jealous of Ellen. And so one of Wharton's best ironies is lost. This problem could have been avoided by a quick flash-back. My only other criticism is that the screenplay's concentration on the book's lyricism is at the expense of its wit. Otherwise, the adaptation is a model for what it includes and excludes.

But, good as the script is, a routine director might have turned it into a sluggish, though literate, movie. Scorsese's staging probes and illuminates, but in a very different manner from that of his earlier films. In them, there was always an abundance of pungent dialogue and good acting but everything was swept along by Scorsese's visual rhetoric. In *The Age of Innocence*, the balance between what is seen and how the camera sees it is adjusted in favor of the actor.

In a box at the theater, Newland joins the countess and her companions. He has been profoundly moved by the play; it has fueled his romantic feelings and he wants to share his rapture with this woman he desires. At first, they neither speak nor look at each other, and the chit chat of their friends prevails. Then Scorsese abruptly shuts off the surrounding sound, including the bustle in the orchestra seats below. A spotlight illuminates the two lovers. And into this sudden silence the countess speaks, while the whole world is hushed so that Archer may savor her words. It's a *coup de théâtre*, yet, as executed here, intimate and unforced.

Scorsese can take a perfectly ordinary sight, logs burning in a fireplace, and transform it into a motif that certifies what an actor is expressing. Early in the story, when the countess yields to Archer's counsel that she remain in her loveless marriage, the director cuts to the fireplace as a semiconsumed log collapses into the blaze. Later, when Ellen shows Newland why he must give her up and marry May, the shot of the burning wood is repeated: now it's his turn to submit. Near the conclusion, when Archer is about to ask his wife for a divorce, she thwarts him with a startling announcement. Once again, a log collapses but this time May goes to the fireplace and pushes the wood into the center of the fire so that it may be consumed even more rapidly. Despite her simpering exterior, May knows exactly what she wants and exactly how to get it.

The problem for the three leads was to keep the audience aware that under polite surfaces storms are raging but never to let the audience dismiss those surfaces as mere hypocrisy. All three performances succeed brilliantly.

Michelle Pfeiffer, in a sense, had the easiest task since the countess is the one character in this story to whom modern au-

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diences can relate easily: the proto-liberated woman in revolt. On the other hand, Olenska is also the most ambiguous character. She expresses a need to be alone and yet is eagerly social; seems to lead Archer on, yet sternly reminds him of his obligations to others; desires to be protected by her lover yet can find a way out of a desperate situation without his help. Pfeiffer's triumph lies not in rationalizing Olenska. The whole woman is there: the attractive physicality (Pfeiffer knows the trick of making cigarette smoking look chic), the nonchalance of a Europeanized American who knows the falsities that prevail on both sides of the ocean, the desperation of a woman who sees an abyss of poverty and friendlessness opening before her. Pfeiffer understands that Ellen is a maddening complexity even to herself.

Daniel Day-Lewis fooled me again. As in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, here he seems to spend the first fifteen minutes skating on the surface of his role as if being comfortable with one's costume and hair style were all there is to acting. I listened and watched very carefully, wondering when the performance was going to begin. After a time, I realized that I was regarding Newland Archer as if he were a childhood friend, as if I were privy to his deepest secrets (as, of course, I was, thanks to Wharton). Day-Lewis's acting had been going on since his first moment on camera, but it is the sort of acting that has no bravura "points" and flourishes. (Day-Lewis can do the bravura stuff, too, as witness *A Room with a View* and *My Left Foot*.) James Agee once described a performance of Teresa Wright's as showing "a novelist's perceptiveness behind the [acting] talent." Same goes for this latest gem from Day-Lewis.

Even critics who have liked this movie have had reservations about Winona Ryder's depiction of May as being too "modern." I found it to be a beautiful piece of work, always in character and in period, and revelatory of both American turn-of-the-century innocence and a hard pragmatism that could coexist with that innocence.

In retrospect, I now wonder that I doubted Scorsese to be the right adaptor for Edith Wharton. Yes, his art is violent and coruscating, but Wharton's is robust and highly dramatic. When the defeated Archer finds himself seated at a farewell dinner for his never-to-be-mistress, Scorsese's climactic long shot is as highly evocative of entrapment as Wharton's language. Archer's adored one is at his elbow while his wife is separated from him by the length of the table. Yet the countess is now unreachable while May has him in a bear trap. The socialites seated on either side of the table have primed that trap to perfection. And the serving men, at attention behind the seated guests, stand as strong as sentries, as merciless as prison guards. It's a trap of obligations that Jean-Claude Van Damme couldn't slug his way out of, against which even Clint Eastwood's six-shooters couldn't prevail.

Edith Wharton and Martin Scorsese are perfectly congenial because both of them understand the uses of force.

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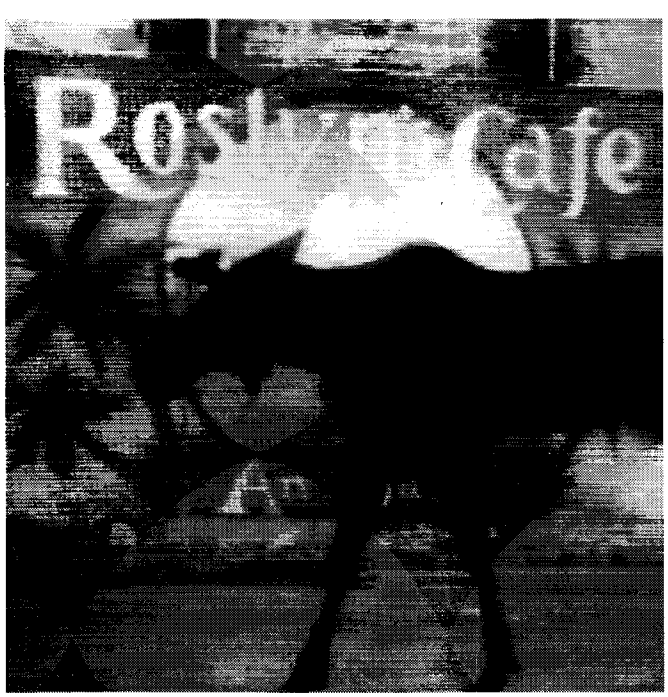
FOLLOW THAT MOOSE

'NORTHERN EXPOSURE'S' PEDIGREE

I've been trying for some time now to understand why "Northern Exposure" is my cherished favorite of everything on the Tube these days. And, as it begins its new season, I've decided that it's because of Shakespeare, Marshall McLuhan, and the blessed irrepressibility of cheerfulness.

Let me elaborate.

"Northern Exposure," hereafter "NE," is an hour-long soap/sitcom/melodrama set in the mythically remote town of Cicely, Alaska. Cicely's remarkable inhabitants include Maurice, the mayor, a war vet and NASA astronaut who is an unreconstructed Reagan-Bush cold warrior; Ruth Ann, the wisely ironic (ironically wise?) older woman who runs the General Store, in continual conflict with Maurice; Ed, a young Native American who works for Ruth Ann—or Maurice—and who dreams of being a filmmaker like his hero, Fellini; Holling, the long-in-the-tooth owner of Roslynn's Cafe (where everybody in Cicely meets), who comes from a violent family and has a shady past; Shelly, a wide-eyed young mix of innocence and experience who speaks fluent Californian, would make Dostoevsky weep, and lives with Holling; and O'Connell, a self-possessed young woman bush pilot who is Cicely's main link with the outside world but whose boyfriends have an inexplicable habit of dying on her (one of them, in the first season, killed by falling satellite debris). And a young moose, that wanders through the main street during the opening credits of each episode. I'll get back to the moose.



Cicely is a self-contained but odd little heterocosm—as what community is not? But the hook, the gimmick that kicks off "NE" as a series, is that an outsider comes to town. Joel Fleishman is a nice Jewish boy from New York who has just gotten his M.D. and has contracted—with Maurice, of course—to spend some years (two? three? as long as the show runs, maybe) as general practitioner in town to pay off his med school. Hip, hypertense, and used to having his salmon scaled, smoked, and on a bagel, Fleishman chafes at the hyperborean eccentricities of his neighbors and, naturally, carries on a bantering-to-hostile semicourtship with the charming O'Connell.

And aha! you say. One more City Mouse meets Country Mouse gag machine, one of the oldest schlockmeister tricks in the schlockmeister trade, from "The Andy Griffith Show" to "Gomer Pyle" to "Beverly Hillbillies" to "Green Acres" to the most, nobody-will-admit-they-liked-it show of all time, "Gilligan's Island."

And I wouldn't be at all surprised if the show were originally pitched that way to the producers. It would *also* be the pitch (with variations) for any of the earlier shows I have mentioned, most beautifully "Gilligan's Island." It would also be the pitch for Shakespeare, selling to his fellow Globe stockholders any of his great romances from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *As You Like It* to *The Tempest*.

The Tempest and "Gilligan"? Think about it. How did the Gilligan bunch get to that island in the first place? (And remember that the Bard, as a writer, was strictly a money player: were he alive today, do you think he'd be writing for the *stage*?)

The great name for the kind of story we're talking about is "pastoral." And what all pastorals have in common—since the form was invented by the Alexandrian poet Theocritus in the third century B.C.—is the myth of the Special Place—the Secret Garden, if you will—where you can take all your everyday cares and, by playing at a simpler, more natural life, have them clarified and healed. That place can be anywhere: the Forest of Arden, the dance floor in Astaire-Rogers films, the bar in "Cheers," or of course Cicely. It becomes the holy place, the greenwood, when you *believe* it is, or better, when you *make believe* it is. The glory of pastoral is that it recognizes play as a profoundly religious act; the Special Place is not just "where everybody knows your name"—but where, stunningly, you do, too. Just remember your eighth-grade class picnic, and you'll be able to read *The Tempest*.

Of course, pastoral as high playfulness can turn into mere silliness and infantilism, just as tragedy as high seriousness can turn into brutality and cynicism. That's why "Gilligan" actually *isn't The Tempest*. The wonderful thing about "NE," though, is that from episode to episode this decline keeps not happening. There's a certain quality about works of art—you know it when it's there, but it's hard as hell to name—whereby the work lets you know that it knows what it's doing, and invites you to join in the daydream. I don't mean just "self-consciousness"—an overused critical term—but some-

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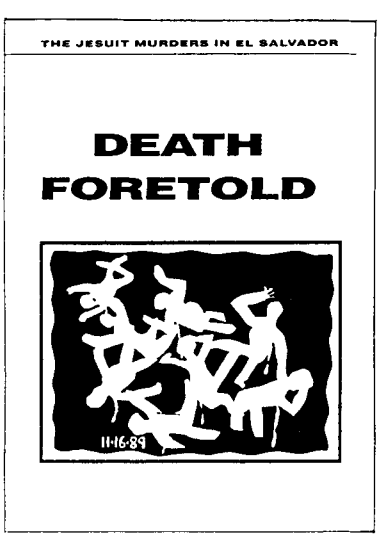
thing more like "self-sharing." Whatever it is, it's a standard that "NE" consistently meets.

For openers—as in Shakespeare's pastorals—it turns out that all the rustics in this pastoral center aren't really rustics at all. Maurice, Ruth Ann, Holling, Shelly, O'Connell—and one I haven't told you about yet—are all from somewhere else (i.e., from the complicated world of the city and the quotidian), and are *playing at* being simple smalltowners, just as Joel Fleishman is playing at being a hipster amongst yokels: the delicious difference is that Maurice, et. al., know what they're doing, and Joel doesn't. Even Ed—the Caliban of the tale—is a sensitive, cinematically literate guy who sees life as a series of situations from classic films, Bergman to Coppola and beyond: not a Noble Savage but an Innocent Sophisticate. And at the opposite end of the scale—the character I haven't yet told you about—is Chris, the deejay for the town's one radio station, whose voiceover commentaries often conclude and obliquely summarize each episode, a freelance rock-and-roll philosopher who is also an ex-con and whose quirky humanism has all the bitter, ironic charity that maybe only ex-cons are fully capable of.

Cicely, in other words, like all great pastoral, is a myth that *knows* it's a myth and invites us, every week, to share the secret that the lies of our innocence are our innocence. It's a consensual hallucination of the primal Garden, and without the skeptical Fleishman it would fall apart just because Joel's skepticism, like that of Shakespeare's fools, keeps reminding us that this ideal little place can't be real: and, by the same token, must be real, because we all dream it so desperately.

How metaphysical of me: sorry. It just happens to be true. "NE" is also, to be sure, a TV show: a TV show that, on numerous occasions, makes reference to the fact that it is a TV show. And that, for me, is maybe the pitch of its intelligence. For, like all of the really heartbreaking pastoral places in literature, Cicely exists only as a fiction: the consensual hallucination not just of its inhabitants, but of its inhabitants and the folks who watch its story unfold. Marshall McLuhan, more than thirty years ago, suggested that TV, with its unprecedented powers of instantaneous intimacy, would ultimately turn the whole world into a "global village," where the sheer flux of information would annihilate our differences and make us all, finally, brothers and sisters.

That itself was a pastoral myth, and a poignant one. And the years since Vietnam have only underscored its poignancy. But, in a funny and lesser way, Cicely is the global village McLuhan dreamed of (as was the bar in "Cheers" and the newsroom in "Mary Tyler Moore," etc.). It isn't the realization in the so-called "real world" of a return to the Garden, but it is a brilliant *imagination* of that return, which is all—all?—art, drama or novel or TV, can really do. "NE" reminds us that we dream of Eden, and makes the dream worthwhile. Cicely, like the Forest of Arden, is really wherever you are when you watch its tale unfold.



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And can a mere TV series bear this weight of interpretation? I can imagine an Elizabethan nerd asking the same thing, in 1592, about a piece of fluff like *Much Ado*. Art and saints have this in common, that they don't wait for official canonization to do the good stuff they do.

Ah, yes: the moose. As the only really "natural" thing in the whole show, that hairy and charming fellow reminds us at the beginning of every installment how fictional, constructed, and *human* is all that follows his initial stroll through town. A real moose in a made-up town: wasn't it Mary Anne Moore who defined poetry as imaginary gardens with real toads in them? FRANK McCONNELL

STAGE

A MAD KING'S MAD DOCTORS

HAWTHORNE AS GEORGE III

The Royal National Theatre's production of Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III* is presently on a short tour in this country. I saw it at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in late September; a strategically placed reader can see it right now at the Colonial Theater in Boston. Although the play opens with the king and his court sweeping down a great flight of stairs, and ends with a similarly grand exit, it consists for the most part of tiny clusters of characters in conversation or in confrontation with the presumably mad king. For that reason, I suspect that it would be more effective in a smaller space than the cavernous BAM.

Near the end of the play, Lord Thurlow, who has just been introduced to *King Lear* by King George, tearfully recounts the end of the play, lamenting the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. It is a tragedy, he concedes, but he would have preferred a happy ending. *Madness* would have pleased him. Bennett suggests in a program note that George was suffering from porphyria rather than dementia, but, ill or mad, the king had several periods of incoherence and spent his last ten years insane and in isolation. This is the end of the real king's tragedy, but the story Bennett tells is of a first collapse (1788-89), during which the crown is almost taken from him by the vain, preening Prince of Wales, but which ends with George III's return to rationality and power.

There are two plays at work in *Madness*. One is a vehicle for a talented performer; the other is a history chronicle, which is in fact a satiric play about politics and medicine. The role of George III, which takes the character from amiable eccentricity to logorrhea, violence, and excessive pain at the hands of the doctors who are supposed to be curing him, and brings him back again, is a dream part for an actor. Nigel Hawthorne gives a remarkable performance in the role, making a funny, sly, vituperative creature of the troubled king. His verbal collapses are much more frightening than the physical ones.

In the political play, the Prince of Wales and his Whig allies, who would like to see the king permanently out of his mind—and William Pitt, the prime minister, and the rest of His Majesty's Government, who would like him to display at least the semblance of sanity—struggle to get or to retain power. The doctors, each of whom has his pet treatment, are allies of one group or the other, and they are indifferent to the suffering of their patient, thinking of him abstractly as a case and concretely as a source of income. Dr. Willis, the clergyman turned mind doctor, is a more ambiguous figure. The king returns to sanity under his care, but if George is suffering from porphyria rather than madness, Willis's disciplinary treatment may have nothing to do with the cure. He is, then, just another of Bennett's medical cartoons and an occasion for satire about insiders vs. outsiders within the profession. The callousness of the doctors is a symptom of the political disease affecting most of the characters—an inability to respond sympathetically to the suffering of the king, who is for them little more than a prop, and a necessity to mask their selfishness in the platitudes of concern. There is, then, a tough political point at the heart of *Madness*, but the work is more playful than dark in expressing this theme. Bennett has a taste for broad caricature that can be seen at its most obvious in the tiresome figures of the doctor who constantly carries a chamber pot to consult the king's stool and a young man, being touted by his uncle for a royal appointment, who is so stupid that he can only stand dazed while unanswered questions float past him.

From what one heard in the lobby, playgoers flocked to BAM more for Nigel Hawthorne than for Bennett's play. It was a testimonial to the power of the actor. A similar but very different testimonial can be found in *In Persons*, which celebrates Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson, who have been partners on and off stage for almost fifty years. The two performers tell personal and theatrical anecdotes, do scenes from plays in which they have appeared, recite poetry, generally make themselves likable. The theatrical excerpts—particularly the bits torn out of *Major Barbara*—are not very effective, and much of the staging in the tiny space at the Kaufman Theater is too busy or too cute. Going to *In Persons* has less the feel of a theatrical evening than of a party in which the honored guests have been asked to perform. I felt that we ought to sing "Happy Birthday"—or, at least, something appropriate. I found myself thinking warmly of Wallach as the rambunctious Mangiacavallo in *The Rose Tattoo* and Jackson as the hilarious analysand in *Oh Men! Oh Women!* Perhaps a fond forty-year-old memory was the right response to *In Persons*.

It is probably not a theater critic's place to say so, but the best show in New York at the moment is the string of Botero statues decorating the center strip from 54th to 61st on Park Avenue. I particularly recommend the woman in the polka-dot dress at 58th Street and the cat at 55th. GERALD WEALES

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Nancy Mairs's Book of Hours

ALANE SALIERNO MASON

Spiritual autobiography is not the most respectable of genres these days; in a nakedly self-revealing age, it is self-revealing in all the wrong ways. One risks looking ridiculous, sounding irrational, confessing a sense that one is not in complete control of one's own fate, and is not meant to be. That Nancy Mairs takes these risks as boldly and as knowingly as she does is one of the most refreshing pleasures of *Ordinary Time*, her memoir of a life spent "against all principles of reason—in an uneasy and unrelenting state of religious faith."

Since Mairs, a convert to Catholicism, was not brought up in the church, she escapes the clichés of many of the Catholic contributions to memoir: the descriptions of cruel nuns, degenerate priests, airless confessionals, lurid statues, itchy woolen uniforms, the rote recital of catechism (of these, the lurid statues are the only part she might be sorry to have missed out on, though she does wonder what it would have been like to have had female saints as role models). Instead, she was raised a proper Yankee Congregationalist, fearful of displeasing both "God and Mama" with unruly behavior (protosexual behavior in particular) and expected to grow up to fit snugly into the role of "the little woman," never to utter a discouraging word or an impolite truth, never to discuss religion, politics, or sex. Under these conditions—as one learns in greater detail in her collections of essays, *Plaintext* (University of Arizona, 1986) and *Carnal Acts* (HarperCollins, 1990), Nancy Mairs almost did not survive. That she did survive—despite attacks of agoraphobia so acute they at one point confined her not only to her house but to one corner of her living room couch; severe depression, six months in a state mental hospital and twenty-one rounds of electroconvulsive shock therapy; two suicide attempts; and the crippling progression of multiple sclerosis—seems something of a miracle, if a miracle of the this-worldly kind. Between the time of her first breakdown, in her early twenties, and the publication of her first book, feminism came into its own and antidepressant drugs and psychotherapy became widely available. Without them, *Ordinary Time* would most likely not have been written, and Mairs might have gone the way of Shakespeare's hypothetical sister in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own.*

Book discussed in this essay

Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal, *by Nancy Mairs, Beacon Press, $20, 238 pp.*

Mairs is neither vain nor superstitious enough to suggest that God subjected her to these travails and then brought her through them so that she could communicate God to us in her books; she does not see God as the kind of supreme controller who creates and then saves us from adversity, plants obstacles and then helps us over, creating and then testing our characters as in a recipe for personhood. No one, she insists, handed her multiple sclerosis and her husband a cancerous melanoma, for "God is another order of being, upon whom we would do well not to project our nastier predilections." Mairs's view of God is more organic, and often funnier: the "messy and absentminded housekeeper who never puts anything back in quite the same place twice," or, most beautifully: "Not an immutable entity detached from time but a continual calling and coming into being. Not transcendence, that orgy of self-alienation beloved of the fathers, but immanence: God working out Godself in every thing."

The down-to-earthness of Mairs's spiritual reflections is a continual surprise. In her introduction she writes of trying to write *Ordinary Time* while her husband was in chemotherapy. "'If God is going to be present to me,' I recall reflecting one evening as George hunched in spasms over the pink plastic basin that accompanied us home from the hospital...'she'll simply have to wade through the mess chemotherapy is currently making in our lives. I can't

ALANE SALIERNO MASON *is an editor at Harcourt Brace. She lives in New York City.*

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scramble away from it up to some loftier plane.'" She writes of "practical expertise," "the homeliness of the holy," "the protracted process I've come to know as conversion." The chapter describing how Mairs and her husband decided to become Catholics is titled, "In Which I am Not Struck Blind on the Road to Damascus." Mairs is radically unpretentious. Whether her sights are trained on herself or on the Great Mysteries, her honesty and humor come liberally and impartially into play. "I profess each week to believe in 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.' I figure it's all right to repeat these words, a venial lie, anyway, since I might well believe them if I had any idea what they meant and maybe sheer reiteration will force them to yield up their meaning one day." She does not indulge treacle or cant, nor is she a mystic. Her closest approximation of a mystical experience comes when her multiple sclerosis is worsening by the day, and she begs God to heal her. When the three words "But I am" are articulated in her consciousness, she realizes that she is asking for the wrong thing: what she so desperately wants is a cure for her illness, but what she is getting is a healing more radical and profound (if far messier) than any physical "cure" might provide.

Some in the secular world insist that the one thing all religious people cling to, that secularists are adult enough to do without, is the notion of certainty. Yet if there's one—and there may, in the end, be only one—thing Nancy Mairs seems absolutely certain about, it is "the radical uncertainty of life." Hers is the kind of faith that is not taken for granted but chosen daily, even hourly. The notion that she, whose own legs are prone to collapse beneath her without warning, moves in a world buttressed by certainties, would seem ludicrous to her; she will not separate the physical and the spiritual realms in a way that would allow this to be so even in a metaphorical or metaphysical sense. Others in their atheism, moving soundly and thoughtlessly wherever their strong legs bear them, are more familiar with certainty than she is in her faith.

Consistent with the earthiness of Mairs's approach is her route to Catholicism, which was at least partly through left-wing politics. In Arizona she and her husband discovered a Catholic community where nuns in tennis shoes "spent their summer vacations with the farm workers, in the fields, in the camps, in the jails." The presence of others visibly committed to the faith, a lifelong exposure to the aesthetic richness of Catholic culture, a sense of social justice, an attraction to the concept of grace—somehow these elements combined, and Nancy and George became Catholics. Certainly it was not out of any attraction to the institutional stability and dogmatic rigors of the church. Mairs describes her position on (if not her past practice of) marriage as "conservative," but that may be all she's conservative about, and her characterizations of the church hierarchy and its views are decidedly irreverent. At times her approach might be too

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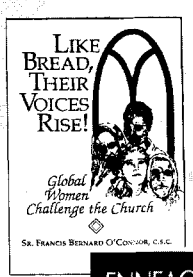

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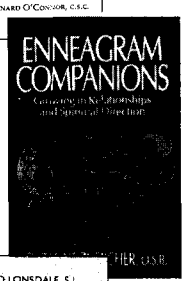

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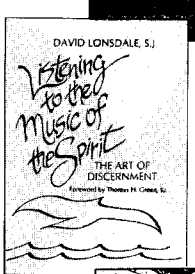

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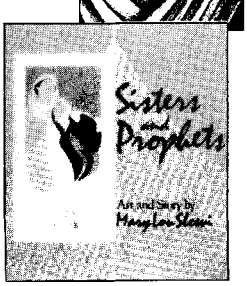

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"nontraditional" for some whom it might otherwise have reached. She calls God "she," has no use for the concept of Mary's virginity (an outlook many of us must secretly share), and, in evoking God's parental feelings towards us, notes casually that "perhaps even Jesus was a father." Clearly it doesn't matter to Mairs much whether he was or wasn't: she is heterodox not to challenge the orthodox, but simply because her reflections have led her there. What she cares about is the emotional truth of the relationship between God and creation, and the nature of God as we can conceive and approach God through the truths of our own experience.

Yet although Mairs promises in her introduction "to avoid the temptation to withdraw into abstractions, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual," she does occasionally toss in abstractions that are political: patriarchy, capitalism, Western thinking. There's a predictability and a glibness to the references to these Bad Guys (George Bush, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Star Wars). Among a number of other quotes and references to liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, Mairs approvingly quotes his description of capitalism as "the most complete and sophisticated and enduring form of totalitarianism which human social consciousness has yet devised." This rather bold statement is not presented as a matter for discussion or debate or justification, but instead as an article of faith, one of a number that clot her otherwise lucid prose style with phrases like "characteristic of patriarchally shaped consciousness" and "(re)productive and/or consumptive markers." These instances are relatively few (and often leavened by humor), but where they do appear they seem borrowed, undigested. What Mairs has done for the teachings of the church fathers she does not seem to have done for those of her more contemporary mentors: shaken down their words for their essential reality (if there is one), reinterpreted them in more concrete terms, breathed the life of originality into them.

In her notes on sources Mairs describes how she reads for an hour or two each day before beginning to write, and I find myself wishing she would just plunge in and save her reading for the end of the day, so she wouldn't have less felicitous voices in her head as she writes to interrupt her own eloquent writing voice, which is lean, agile, surprising, both graceful and disarmingly direct—a voice both conversational and literary. The most effective moments in the book are those when one feels, as if right on the other side of the membrane of the printed page, her very individual presence. Yet in the moments of what seems like borrowed prose the membrane becomes opaque—behind it one sees a book, and behind that another book. It suggests some vestigial dependence on authority (nonpatriarchal, perhaps, but authority nonetheless) that doesn't quite go with the irreverence, the hard-won independence, and the authority of personal experience which characterize the rest of Mairs's prose and thought.

For those of us who see the institutional church as a hopelessly stubborn old relative with failing eyesight whom we love anyway and who may yet cough up bits of wisdom we might not have discovered on our own, the unrelieved portrait of it as patriarchal oppressor—and of Catholicism as "of all the not-notably woman-friendly forms of Christianity...the most radically and intransigently misogynistic"—seems a little rough. Certainly the particular intransigence of the church on issues like women priests and birth control is hard to justify, as it is hard to fault Mairs for hewing too closely to feminist theory when one realizes that without it she might never have found within herself and her own life the makings of these books. Yet within the world of contemporary American Catholicism, this view is more the rule than the exception, and it becomes easy to forget that modern feminism grew out of the bias of Judeo-Christian culture toward emphasis on the individual; and that though a church dominated by women might not fall into identical kinds of error, it would no doubt fall into error all the same.

There are the politics of the church, and then there is the faith of the church. Mairs's work goes to the heart of what matters, to the elucidation of faith embodied in an everyday life—a life of devastating illness, marital distances and infidelities, the rebellion of children, debilitating depression, and caring for difficult strangers (including the welfare mother and the emotionally disturbed teen-ager who, at different times, move into the Mairs's home). Her unassuming tales embody, in themselves, the mystery of incarnation; her belief, grounded on the rock of her own being in the world, reveals itself as something miraculous, full of grace.

In writing about facing death, she describes the task of "bringing the whole of life to consciousness," including its sorrows, pains, incongruities, and terrors. This she does in her work, and if the whole of life includes some undigested chunks of abstract feminist theory and unsupported reflections on the evils of capitalism, so be it. At least she has the integrity to confess an inability to balance a checkbook on the same page as she offers her opinions on macroeconomics. For those of us who grapple with a world view that is both secular and religious and who, rather than sacrifice one for the other, are intent on muddling along in the grey area in between, Nancy Mairs offers evidence for just how fertile a place that can be. This is a woman who grasps the word of God and embodies it in her own very human life. Whatever skepticism one might have had about liberation theology or potluck Catholicism, one is, with one's stereotypes and arrogance and middle-of-the-road line-toeing, brought to one's knees in admiration. Here is a good woman.

In the "companion volume" to *Ordinary Time*, a memoir rich in sensory detail called *Remembering the Bone House* (HarperCollins, 1989), Mairs compares skipping over the introduction to that book to entering a house through the back door and sitting down to a cup of coffee in the kitchen. (A similar metaphor applies at the end of *Plaintext*, where she invites the reader to come by for a cup of almond tea.) A convivial sharing of a warm and satisfying brew is truly what reading Mairs's work, in its best moments, is like; one leaves grateful to have spent ordinary time in that place, in the company of an extraordinary woman with whom one is proud to share the family name "mortal." □

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If Haiti were a novel

NO OTHER LIFE
Brian Moore
Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, $21, 223 pp.

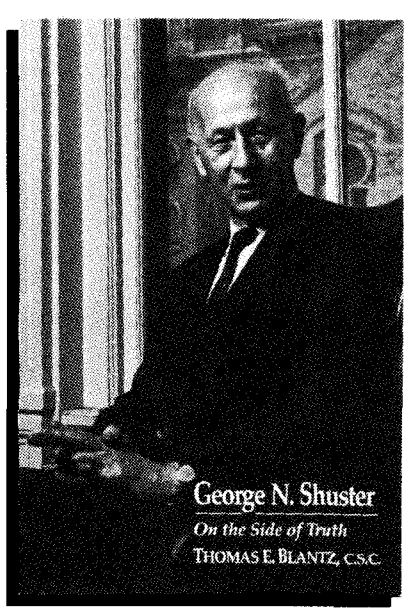
Paul Elie

The presence of the Reverend Jean-Bertrand Aristide lies like a fingerprint upon the pages of Brian Moore's new novel. The book dutifully carries a disclaimer—any resemblances to actual persons are just coincidences—but only the truly credulous could avoid considering events in Haiti while reading this story of a charismatic priest who gains the presidency of a Caribbean island country, prompting religiously charged hope and civic unrest. Like Moore's novels *Black Robe* and *The Color of Blood*, *No Other Life* is a small book about big events; this time out, his novel's prescience has prompted unusually thorough lead essays in the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New York Review of Books*. From his ambiguous dedication—"To Jean"—onward, Moore has obliged those who seek an adroit blending of fact and fiction, an entertaining gloss on a breaking story. But the real interest here lies in the way Moore, rather than imaginatively enlarging life, has narrowed it down so that its hard truths strike the reader cleanly and sharply.

The novel is narrated by one Paul Michel, a French Canadian priest who, after two decades serving the poor of Ganae, is "looking at the empty pages of my life," and mainly at his relations with the Reverend Jean-Paul Cantave, whom he affectionately calls Jeannot. As a young priest, Michel rescued Jeannot, an orphan, from a squalid village, adopted him as a son of sorts, and had him educated in the Catholic schools that serve Ganae's mulatto elite. Eventually Jeannot, following Michel's example, became a priest, and now, serving the poor as pastor of the Church of the Incarnation, he has emerged as a powerful leader, "small and frail in cheap white cotton trousers and peasant shirt, slack as a puppet on strings until the microphones were readied and the media people signaled that it was time to begin." Inevitably, Jeannot is drawn into politics. "The history of Ganae," Michel observes, "is like a cheap gramophone record. The new tune plays for a while, then the needle sticks in the groove and the player-arm slumps back and slips off the disc." Ganae's military dictator is dying of AIDS. Elections are called, and Michel suggests that Jeannot run for president as the candidate of the poor; in one of the exquisite ambiguities that make the novel interesting, Moore leaves unclear whether Michel has planted the seed of ambition in Jeannot's head or just stated aloud what the younger priest was already thinking.

From there, events unfold in a way that resembles Aristide's vexed career. Though Michel is ostensibly looking back on his life, the story is lean and brisk, with very little retrospective hand-wringing. As president, Jeannot challenges the military and the wealthy elite; he ignores or supersedes parliament and packs his cabinet with associates who, like him, espouse liberation theology. His order defrocks him

A new book about
George N. Shuster



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and the Vatican warns him against meddling in politics, accusing him of trying to found a schismatic "People's Church." The people come to think of him as their redeemer, and even as their Redeemer, crying "*C'e Mesiah!*" when he visits. In a series of rousing speeches—set in blank verse, like the poetic passages in the Jerusalem Bible—Jeannot declares, "Rejoice./You are the people./ You have the power./Use it." Naturally, they riot. A coup is planned, and Jeannot flees to the countryside, with Michel along as spiritual advisor. So begins Jeannot's ultimate fall and rise, which culminates in a subtle final gambit that one suspects Aristide himself would envy.

The novel is no simple fictionalized history: Ganae and its people are described in passages of firm, cold, novelistic beauty, and Moore renounces the most fictionally seductive fact available to him, remaking the brutal "necklace" killings as a series of murders committed with machetes. Even so, the strong similarities to the Haitian situation rob the plot of much of its drama: as events develop, they seem more to conform to the contours of recent history than to unfold according to the novel's own imperatives.

This matters less than it might have, though, because in the end the novel remains Father Michel's story not Jeannot's, and the longest shadow cast over it is not Jean-Bertrand Aristide's but Graham Greene's. Working among Ganae's desperately poor, Michel has become a practical agnostic, and when he returns to Canada to be present at his dying mother's bedside, he is nudged over the edge into unbelief. "Paul, I have prayed all my life," his mother tells him. "I believed in God, in the church. I believed I had a soul that was immortal. But I have no soul. When we die, there is nothing....There is no other life." As her last wish, she urges him to stop living the lie of his priesthood, and he returns to Ganae doubting that Jeannot's mission is anything but a worldly one; he is now a skeptic even as he regards Jeannot as a kind of saint.

As such, he resembles the protagonists of the writer who depicted Duvalier-era Haiti in *The Comedians*. Late in his life Greene called Moore his favorite living novelist, and here Moore has repaid the tribute. Michel is a character straight out of Greeneland: a colonialist of sorts in a distant outpost, a moderate among fanatics, a man caught between faith and despair, between the habits of transcendence and the ache in his bones which says this broken world is all there is.

A generation on, however, the terms of this kind of spiritual dilemma have changed significantly. In his time, Greene's straitened and elusive religious outlook was subversive enough to be derided as Jansenist or just plain heretical. Today such an outlook is commonplace. Meanwhile there has emerged, in liberation theology, a religious outlook which, while wary of next-worldly transcendence, locates the hand of God in the shape of political history. This, of course, is Jeannot's theology. "Was I elected to do these things for God's sake, or for the sake of the poor of Ganae? Aren't they the same thing?" So Michel and Jeannot alike affirm that there is no other life, but draw vastly different conclusions. For the *blanc* priest, the words are an epigram of despair and meaninglessness; for the *noir* one, they are a divine imperative to do God's work in the here and now. Moore's skillful and thoughtful exploration of the two priests' spiritual lives—now diverging, now running in parallel—is the most satisfying aspect of the novel. "I am nothing./But I am God's servant./God has given me this sword," Jeannot tells the people of Ganae, and he might seem a madman were their circumstances not so grave, and were he not such a charismatic figure. As Michel observes, "This wasn't 'liberation theology.' This was a faith built around one man."

For his part, describing a flight out of Ganae, Michel recalls, "My plane...passed over the abandoned buildings of the Bicentennial Exposition Ground, that symbol of Ganae's efforts to imitate other, more fortunate lands. But the people of Ganae know no other lands. They live in a world apart. Even to me as I flew away from it, its endless struggles, its cruelties and despairs seemed a tale so frightening that, if I told it, no one would believe such a place existed." Such a place does exist, and in *No Other Life* Moore has made it palpable. And despite its characters' protestations that there is no other life, the novel serves as a reminder that there is another life of sorts—that of art, in which despair and deep faith can complement each other in ways that enlarge our apprehension of this life, if not the next one. □

A PRIMAL INSTINCT: NATIONALISM

THE WRATH OF NATIONS
Civilization and the Fury of Nationalism
William Pfaff
Simon & Schuster, $22, 244 pp.

Ivan Sanders

William Pfaff's *The Wrath of Nations* is a refreshing antidote to the swell of books about the end of modernity, the end of history; to the gloomy predictions of global turmoil as well as to happy tidings about millennial peace. It, too, is an end-of-the-century reflection on history, but this reassessment, of shifting political alignments and the abiding "fury of nationalism," is neither apocalyptic nor particularly comforting; it is rather a sober recitation of the plagues and virtues of the inescapable force known as nationalism.

It is not an age-old force. Pfaff doesn't let us forget that the ethnic state, ubiquitous though it may be, is in truth a fiction, an invention of the nineteenth century, as is the notion of internationalism, with both of them drawing their strength from Enlightenment ideals. The French Revolution, after all, was at once a universalist and an intensely nationalist phenomenon. More

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often, the two have been rivals, although internationalist ideologies are no match for the fury of nationalism. As Pfaff sees it, the political "isms" of the modern world: imperialism, fascism, communism have all succumbed to the unquenchable fires of nationalism, mainly because nationalism, he feels, is not an ideology but an outgrowth of "primordial human attachments to family, clan, and community." "It is unreasonable, considered as a general phenomenon, while natural as a specific one." Nationalist fervor persists because these primordial attachments persist:

> Nationalism has about it the sweat of passion and hatred, caused by its belief in the radiant and recuperable past, producing the private readiness to kill neighbor and friend....The nationalist has his heart in his work. He is a concrete thinker. He is a limited thinker too, but he acts from the roots of being, of human society, from a given earth and clan....That is why he causes so much confusion to the man of ideas.

This suggests that the world event very much on the author's mind, the event that may well have prompted his meditations, was the savagery that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia. Though reluctant, with good reason, to take sides in the ongoing conflict, Pfaff does point out that what we are seeing in Serbia, as well as in some of the successor states of the former Soviet Union, is the worst of both worlds—"Totalitarian nationalism"; ruthless state control without the veneer of Marxism. Not that this is an entirely new development. What Pfaff attempts to demonstrate is that even universalist creeds, or supranational formations that purport to be liberal and democratic, are not devoid of nationalist appeal.

The ethnic and racial particularism of rightist ideologies is fairly self-evident, although Pfaff stresses the international character of both German National Socialism and Italian fascism. And we have seen often enough the champions of proletarian internationalism fall back on nationalist biases and clichés. Pfaff goes further still, and argues that behind the liberal internationalism of the evolving European community there is the pressing need to compete successfully with

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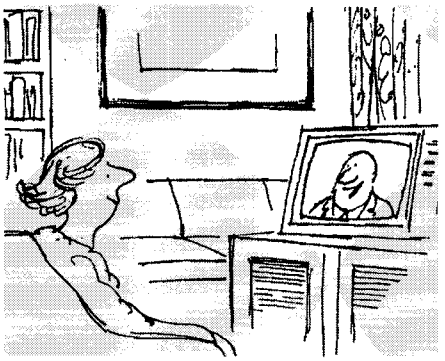
economic rivals; thus, he notes, "European unification is an expression or instrument of nationalism as well as a subordination or sublimation of it."

Pfaff is justified in placing special emphasis on Eastern Europe and the Balkans in his global survey of resurgent nationalism. It is here that we have witnessed, and keep witnessing, the spectacular failure of the noble Wilsonian dream. The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 sanctioned the birth of independent nation states on the ruins of defeated empires, but in reality it created countries with large, restive ethnic minorities, and the region has been a hotbed of competing nationalisms ever since. The sheer size of these minorities made assimilation or even real integration impossible; their presence remained a constant source of friction. "Because the minority is where it is," Pfaff points out, "it causes the government under which its members live (and the majority population as well) to believe that it is naturally subversive of the majority order, and represents an actual or potential irredentism on the part of the country where its nationality is the majority. The concern of that country's government and public for the minorities outside its frontiers is taken as proof of this." In other words, it is a no-win situation. (The case of Hungary



"Good evening and welcome to the evening round-up of worldwide bad news. Tonight, things are in a pretty pickle in Paris, a really fine mess in Moscow, a knotty tangle in Tel Aviv, and utter chaos in Katmandu...."

in this connection is especially interesting and instructive. The Treaty of Versailles, for that country, was a true disaster, resulting in the loss of close to two-thirds of its former territory. But Hungary's later alliance with Nazi Germany, which enabled it to regain some of the lost territories, ultimately led to an even greater disaster. Because its minorities were either killed off or ended up on the other side of redrawn borders, along with millions of its own nationals, of course, Hungary today is perhaps the only ethnically "pure" country in Eastern Europe; within its borders it has no national minorities to speak of. And while conservative nationalists would never openly admit it, most Hungarians nowadays consider themselves fortunate for not having that particular headache to contend with. William Pfaff would probably agree with this assessment, though he does ask rather pointedly: "What is historical Hungary without its Jews?")

While highlighting certain European models, Pfaff sticks to his premise that the nationalist renascence is a worldwide phenomenon. His ken extends far beyond Europe. He deals at length with Asian and African forms of nationalism, maintaining, however, that there, too, nationalism was a Western import, an alien intrusion in what were often insular and self-sufficient civilizations. Exposure to Western political ideas hastened the development of a national consciousness in these cultures, for it was realized soon enough that the modern world demanded nations. Ultimately, in their struggle against colonialism, they beat the West at its own game, for even the ideologically oriented liberation movements turned out to have secret nationalist agendas. (The U.S. thought it was battling communism in Vietnam; but the real enemy was Vietnamese nationalism.)

The result of all this, in Pfaff's view, is none too encouraging. Liberation and independence brought with them authoritarian rule of one type or another. In postcolonial Africa the picture is especially gloomy. Pfaff surveys the damage done by Westernized African elites who had imposed the "naive and unworkable ideas of state socialism" on tribal cultures because "such was the fashion on the European Left." He also discusses the Islamic renewal, seeing it as yet another form of quite furious nationalism. The big difference here, though, is that Islam has remained an essentially religious culture. Despite its great thinkers and scientists, it was untouched by the rationalism and theological skepticism that has shaped modern Western civilization. Islamic fundamentalism, then, is a reaction to incomplete and inadequate secular nationalism—what Pfaff calls "junk Westernization."

Yet Pfaff is no more sanguine about developments in the most advanced Western societies. He devotes an entire chapter to American nationalism, in which he presents a curious reinterpretation of American history. He speaks of a civilization in decline, of the "falsified renewal" of recent years, of a richly variegated, complicated America that is no more. He sees a society that became, though only after the Civil War, too centralized and too powerful too fast, and he even theorizes that perhaps it would have been better if the Confederacy had been allowed to remain an independent state. If that had happened, "North Americans today might be more comfortable with themselves and with the world." The author who elsewhere in his book appears to be a cautious internationalist sounds in this chapter like a very old-fashioned American patriot. Which is all the more surprising since at times he evinces a decidedly European disdain for confident American prescriptions for world order, an attitude that may be attributed to the fact that for some years now he has been observing the interna-

REVIEWERS

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RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is the author of a book of stories,* The Last to Go *(Harcourt Brace). His stories have appeared in* Harper's, *the* Atlantic, Story, *and other magazines, and his book reviews in the* New York Times Book Review *and* Commonweal. *Cooper lives in Mainz, Germany.*

PATRICIA A. O'CONNELL's *reviews have appeared in the* New York Times Book Review *and other publications.*

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tional scene from Paris.

But perhaps it's unreasonable to expect unwavering consistency in a book such as this. William Pfaff is a journalist, an intellectual, not a professional historian; and *The Wrath of Nations* is a rigorously intellectual but subjective and impressionistic examination of nationalism. The author himself labels it, rather too modestly, the "conjectures of a dilettante." But therein lies its value, and its charm. He feels free to digress, to be anecdotal, to appeal to unfashionable authority, to cite obscure sources. (Who would have thought, for instance, that a 1914 editorial in the *Wabash Plain Dealer* would be worth quoting in 1993?) His prose, too, is lucid, functional, nonacademic, which makes his occasional lapses into foreign-policy jargon somewhat disconcerting.

Actually, the abiding strength of nationalism elicits both subjective comment and learned analysis. Pfaff may speak admiringly of a Roman citizen's proud identification with an empire, or nostalgically of the polyglot nature of the Habsburg monarchy, or wistfully of the fast-vanishing regional characteristics of his own native country, but he also knows that the fading of a strong national consciousness can lead to national decline. It's not without a certain sense of satisfaction that he notes nationalism's inevitable triumph over "higher ideals," though it doesn't stop him from viewing with dismay nationalism's more primitive or absurd manifestations.

All this suggests a deeply pessimistic view of history; but it may not even be that. Like many conservative historians before him, Pfaff simply rejects the notion of historical progress and questions the validity of any "scientific" view of history. Yet one kind of progress needs to be stressed more—the irreplaceable progress toward genuine democracy. For what else can tame the fury of nationalism, or enable people to give voice to legitimate national aspirations? Several years ago, after the fall of communism, the magic word was on everybody's lips. Democracy was the most obvious, the simplest, the only answer. What we are finding out, of course, is that it's also the most difficult answer. □

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SLAYING STRAW DRAGONS

THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM
Stephen Holmes
Harvard University Press, $29.95, 330 pp.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

This is a slash-and-burn book. Stephen Holmes, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, sets out to slay the dragons of antiliberalism wherever they may be lurking. Holmes does try, from time to time, to give a bit of credit here and there to the thinkers he is busily dispatching, but his heart isn't in it. The result is a terribly uneven effort. Given the intensity of his wrath—and his prose—Holmes is bound to hit his targets from time to time and when he does one is riveted by the spectacle. But the book doesn't hold together.

In his preface, Holmes ponders why "some of America's leading intellectuals revile a tradition devoted, among other things, to freedom of thought?" A provocative but misleading opener for several reasons. First, a good bit of Holmes's riposte aims to do in Joseph de Maistre, a French Catholic writer and diplomat who died in 1821, and whose own ire was leveled against the assumptions and excesses of the French Revolution. Carl Schmitt, a fascinating but morally dubious theorist, a critic of Weimar Germany but a defender of representative government, who was too close to Nazi doctrine for comfort ("residual sympathy" is the way Holmes describes it), also gets scrutinized. These are easy targets compared to the American thinkers Holmes goes after.

Second, those American intellectuals—or intellectuals whose lives were spent primarily in an American context—people like Leo Strauss, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Christopher Lasch—scarcely "revile" freedom of thought. Rather, they challenge the sort of freedom that gets encoded in encomiums to free thought and ponder whether or not that understanding of freedom is itself open to critical scrutiny.

Holmes knows he is open to the charge of making folks like MacIntyre and Lasch "guilty by association" with antidemocrats like Maistre or Schmitt. He tries to get out of the conundrum by claiming that MacIntyre and others are not quasi-Fascists but that "they have absorbed and reproduced rhetoric whose history and implications they have failed to ponder." Fortunately, they "benefit from historical circumstances that make them politically harmless." So: if they are so harmless and so unconscious (that is, they pay little or no attention to the "origins and political abuse of their fondest ideas"), why take them seriously? Because they are *there* and they annoy the hell out of Holmes. Moreover, in some transformed context these folks Holmes describes as thinkers who "declare the entire Western world except for themselves to be depraved and diseased..." might not be so harmless. Better to slay the dragons now!

Many of the discrete essays loosely joined together in this book began life as reviews of the works of particular thinkers. This may help to account for the somewhat jerky and disjointed feel to the volume. Holmes strives mightily to associate his crew of antiliberals one with the other, but the harder he tries the more tendentious it seems. Better, I should have thought, just to state at the outset—"I don't like any of these people very much, and here's why"—than to devise awkward categories that are of little help. I have in mind, for example, "hard" and "soft" antiliberals to which Holmes appends "hard" and "soft" superindividualists and the like. Clearly he knows he's got a problem on his hands fusing a radical democrat or populist like Lasch with an aristocratic defender of the *ancien régime* like Maistre. He struggles to find identical claims in similar words but too often this winds up being a linkage rather

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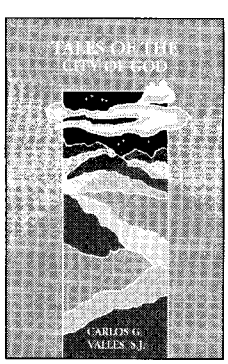

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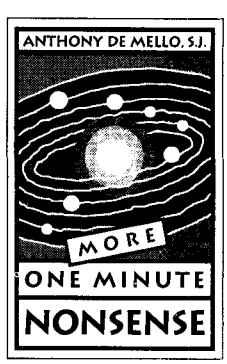

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on a par with, say, "Hitler opposed eating meat; therefore, all vegetarians are proto-Hitlerites—or their ideas might become such if the circumstances were ripe." Now I'm being unfair, but not by much.

Let me give a sense of how Holmes constructs his deposition against the antiliberals. He defines liberalism in the usual way—as a political order devoted to "religious toleration, freedom of discussion, restrictions on police behavior, free elections, constitutional government based on a separation of powers, publicly inspectable state budgets to inhibit corruption, and economic policy committed to sustained growth on the basis of private ownership and freedom of contract." By definition this eliminates Maistre—as it does his opponents, the French revolutionaries, scarcely liberals by Holmes's definition. It would eliminate Schmitt, too. Indeed, many important Western political theorists associated, variously, with "the liberal tradition," most importantly, Hobbes, must get axed as well if Holmes means to be consistent.

I didn't quite recognize either MacIntyre or Lasch in Holmes's characterizations of them. MacIntyre's *After Virtue* becomes "a summa of the postwar antiliberal mind"; Lasch's works easily unmask him "as a cultural conservative cloaked in a leftish fleece." MacIntyre is taken to task primarily for his defense of authority and religion, a defense Holmes finds incompatible with liberal verities. "Liberalism," Holmes claims, "is as antagonistic to authority as to community." Indeed, "liberal culture aims to outlaw the very idea of authority."

But this cannot be right. All the founders of *this* liberal polity were mightily concerned with authority and legitimacy, vexed by how to distinguish the rightful from the illegitimate exercise of power. In his critique of MacIntyre, Holmes uses a tactical nuclear weapon that demolishes many important liberal thinkers who helped to constitute our own tradition. Without some sort of authoritative adherence to, say, constitutional doctrine, constitutionality will falter. Can there be "constitutional government with separation of powers" without legitimate authority? Maybe what Holmes means to indict here is independent authority within "liberal culture" by contrast to a liberal constitutional polity. If so, he should have said so. However, I would still disagree, for one cannot tidily sever the culture from its definitional political framework.

The great Hannah Arendt lamented the disappearance of authority from the modern world and tied it to the fateful assumption—on the part of Protestant reformers, among others—that "unguided individual judgment" would suffice to hold intact much that Luther, and others, cherished. For Arendt, the loss of authority is not something to be celebrated but, rather, a modern reality to be confronted. She writes: "For to live in a political realm with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without the religious trust in a sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together." It is impossible to address that problem without relocating authority, even if in some rough-and-ready way, in beliefs that are widely if imperfectly

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AMERICAN CATHOLIC WOMEN TODAY
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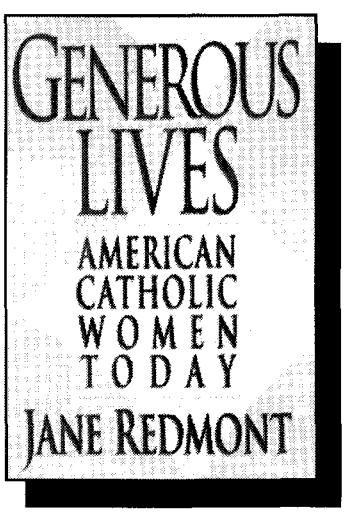

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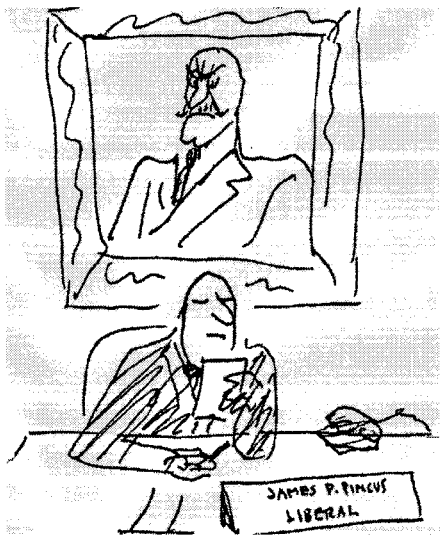
shared—beliefs in the very liberal truisms Holmes endorses, for example.

Whatever one thinks of where MacIntyre comes out, the fact that authority is one of his central concerns does not, in itself, suffice to indict him as beyond the pale. There is much more going on in MacIntyre's work than a hankering after settled agreements. Where Holmes falters, I believe, is in his failure to recognize that MacIntyre is not primarily a political thinker so much as an epistemological protagonist. Thus, when Holmes claims that MacIntyre regrets the lost "harmony of the past and the long-lost 'framework of medieval agreement,'" he misplaces the accent of MacIntyre's work. MacIntyre is not calling for restorationism but for recognition that a "framework" within which disputations of a certain sort could flourish—disagreements, not comforting harmonies—seems unavailable to us. It isn't so much that we should all agree, by no means, but that we increasingly lack the means whereby we can disagree robustly because those who most strenuously adhere to the epistemology MacIntyre associates with the liberal establishmentarians—emotivism, subjectivism, utilitarianism—refuse to recognize their own epistemological commitments. Thus they make universal a view that is, in fact, partial and open to contestation. To be sure, MacIntyre has his own case of polis envy, but what he is about is primarily an epistemological account of traditions, not a political screed against liberal society *in toto*. If you want to take on MacIntyre at his strongest, that is where you must begin.

Now, to Christopher Lasch, arguably one of the most important voices in American public discourse over the past three decades. Lasch is a polemicist and a provocateur. He no doubt overstates his case for emphasis, as do we all from time to time. But, again, the Lasch whose work I know is quite a different and far more interesting fellow than the Lasch Holmes trounces. Lasch is "easily unmasked" as a culturally conservative? Hell, Lasch makes no bones about it. Lasch is a "popular American writer...[who] entertains no great philosophical pretensions." Agreed: Lasch is, after all, a historian, not primarily a philosopher. But to put Lasch in a world in which he is seeing "eye-to-eye with



Heidegger, Schmitt, Strauss" and the like is not to see him at all. That there may be a convergence of concerns between these folks and Lasch, at points, is no doubt true. But Lasch's sources are not Heidegger; they are very much home-grown.

Here Holmes would have been well-instructed to take a look at Jackson Lears's *No Place of Grace* (Pantheon), a provocative study of "antimodernism and the transformation of American culture." Lears lifts up for our consideration the long concern on the part of many of our most original thinkers that American culture was becoming banalized, in large part because of a growing tendency from the nineteenth century on "to equate material and moral progress." His interpretation of this alternative American tradition and its chief spokesmen—Henry Adams is highlighted—is powerfully instructive for it reminds us, as does Lasch, that an American can cherish the Constitution, believe in separation of powers and free elections and accountability and all the rest, and yet find much that has gone awry, much that raises legitimate concern.

Lasch is a democrat and an egalitarian. He is not antiscience; he is opposed to technological triumphalism. He does not believe one must simply trust in blind faith, but he accepts the fact that not everything is, or should be, under our control. Perhaps closest to Lasch in this regard, among major European thinkers, is none other than Vaclav Havel who sounds positively Laschian in his attacks on the "arrogant anthropocentrism of modern man" who believes he can control and define everything. For Havel, it is precisely this attitude that lies at the root of a contemporary crisis in human consciousness, culture, and politics. When Lasch criticizes feminists for disparaging motherhood, he does so from a deep and wide recognition of an alternative feminist—or socially conscious *woman's*—tradition in America, one that helped to create a vast array of social provision during the Progressive Era based precisely on the needs of mothers and children. When mainstream and radical feminists trashed motherhood, finding it a state of abjection and dependency—and they did do this—Lasch's ripostes always drew upon an alternative, and, arguably, feminist set of possibilities.

When Holmes begins to build his own positive case, having dispatched his foes, the book is a letdown. Michael Sandel is treated offhandedly as "perhaps the best-known disciple of MacIntyre and Unger," but Sandel, in fact, is critical of MacIntyre and shares not much at all with Roberto Unger, being most indebted to the philosopher Charles Taylor, who is not discussed save haphazardly by Holmes. "Communitarians" to the man (no female communitarians are discussed) are softhearted nostalgists pining for the lost harmony of a mythic past. The issues that critics of contemporary liberalism take on get rather short shrift from Holmes: three pages devoted to the common good; five pages to the loss of authority; another five to the diminution of the public realm. More compelling are Holmes's defense of the liberal "self" against critics who see it as a version of "acquisitive individualism," following the lead of C.B. MacPherson and others; his defense of moral skepticism and of rights against those who claim rights are selfish. But each of these interventions is by way of a starter, not a meal. If Holmes wants us to partake from the entire liberal menu, we need more than he has given us. Let it be said, finally, that the contemporary antiliberals he discusses in detail—Strauss, MacIntyre, Lasch, and Unger—were and are prepared to defend a democratic polity against antidemocrats. But Holmes's particular sort of *liberal* polity is not the only democratic option. Admittedly, it may be the best we can do, but that is another argument. □

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A LONG-AWAITED ENCORE

BODY & SOUL
Frank Conroy
Houghton Mifflin, $24.95, 450 pp.

Rand Richards Cooper

Younger writers who've pulled off that rare feat, a wonderful first book, work on under a hefty burden of expectations. Frank Conroy was thirty in 1967 when he published *Stop-Time*, his memoirs of a childhood marked by the absence of a disturbed and alcoholic father. A collection of sharp images retrieved "from the very edge of memory," *Stop-Time* anatomized experience rather than judged it, setting forth episodes of boyhood—the thrill of scavenging an abandoned building with a best friend, the brutal beating of a helpless fat boy at boarding school—from a detached, almost amoral perspective that held out to readers the persistent illusion of breaking through adult sentimentality to see life as it "really" was.

Praised lavishly for its intelligent candor by such authorities as Norman Mailer and William Styron, *Stop-Time* went on to become that writer's dream, a true word-of-mouth book, remaining continuously in print decade after decade, winning new generations of readers and setting a standard for childhood narratives against which other talented practitioners—from Annie Dillard to Theodore Weesner to Alice McDermott to E.L. Doctorow—could be measured. Meanwhile, however, Conroy himself (who currently is director of the famed Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa) managed but a single slim volume of stories in a quarter-century (*Midair*, 1984), invoking anxieties—shared, according to interviews, by the author himself—of that nightmare of literary nightmares, a one-book career.

Now, at last, along comes *Body & Soul*, a sprawling *bildungsroman* taking up the youthful adventures of a musical prodigy named Claude Rawlings. Weighing in at 450 pages, the book clearly means to put all doubts to rest: "a big novel..." Conroy has called it, "a book [not] about me but about the world."

Such comments notwithstanding, it's hard not to read *Body & Soul* as an updated *Stop-Time*. Both books have as heroes a musically precocious boy growing up fatherless in postwar New York, and both explore, to a greater or lesser degree, the same terrain: isolation, imagination, and the redemptive power of art. Alas, however—I might as well say it right off—lovers of *Stop-Time* are in for a big disappointment. Slack where *Stop-Time* was taut, stale where *Stop-Time* was startlingly fresh, *Body & Soul* rarely approaches the brilliance of its shimmering progenitor.

The novel begins promisingly enough. Following Claude Rawlings around from the dingy apartment he shares with his taxi-driver mother to the music store where his mentor, Weisfeld, teaches him piano, Conroy takes us on a guided tour through a long-lost New York. Food automats dispense franks and beans for a quarter, neighborhood saloons on V-E Day offer free beer for anyone in uniform, and in the background Rosemary Clooney sings "Come On-a My House." In the shadow of the Third Avenue el, Claude shines shoes, collects bottles, and indulges in a little petty larceny. He's like Doctorow's enterprising New York City boys, growing up clever and tough; but Conroy's version of the street urchin is softened by a quiet, baffled wonder:

> In the general torpor specific noises stood out in high relief—the wheezing of a bus, the clacking, rattling rush of the el, angry voices from inside a tenement, the crash of a storefront gate—thick sounds rising with an eerie clarity against the

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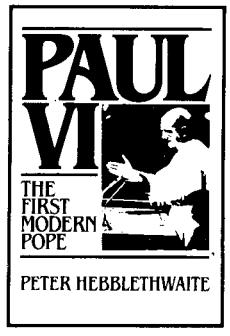

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> unnatural silence. On an empty street he might watch his own feet, as if to reassure himself that he was not dreaming. He might wipe the sweat from his face with the back of his hand and then look at the back of his hand. He was often dizzy.

This is the quiet intensity that made *Stop-Time* so terrific, and it's what Conroy does best: carefully detailing the texture of consciousness, with its dizzying intimations of self and the formidable, sometimes terrifying otherness of the world. Conroy's boy protagonists, while precocious, are nevertheless children; ideas come to them not abstractly, but with a taste, a shape, a sound. Their world is incorrigibly sensual, and in *Body & Soul*, as in his earlier memoirs, the author renders this sensuality superbly.

As soon as *Body & Soul* busies itself with the action of Claude's budding career, however, things start to go bad. Conroy knows a lot about music, and uses it in fashioning a successful career out of the dubious and scattered materials of Claude's circumstances. The problem lies in the characters with whom he surrounds his *wunderkind*. Dividing the boy's world neatly between mentors and antagonists, Conroy paints these figures with very broad strokes. There's the eccentric but kindly artist; the cold and shallow Upper East Side socialite, impervious to art; the shabby, soulful Eastern European Jew, tormented by Holocaust nightmares; the jovial black janitor with a heart of gold and a bottomless fund of folk wisdom ("You got to decide if the mad runs you, or you run the mad"). These are not living characters but types; worse, they're secondhand types, inherited from other New York writers, like Tom Wolfe or Bernard Malamud, who've done them far more compellingly.

Similarly, Conroy seems to have lost his ear for original language. The novel offers a full menu of bad writing, from bland straightforwardness ("A quiet idealism glowed on both of these small, protected campus worlds—islands of optimism within the larger security of calm, prosperous postwar America") to Mushy Love Writing ("As her soul welcomed him, his own was cleansed. As they ascended together into the blue beyond blue, all else was trivial"). One searches *Body & Soul* in vain for the kind of pinpoint-accurate insight into what makes people tick that made *Stop-Time* sing. But the new novel's characters remain stubbornly fuzzy and shallow. They are functional; less like real people than props furnishing the stage of Claude Rawlings's moral education.

The problem goes right to the heart of the differences between the two books. *Stop-Time* was both a reflection upon, and a recreation of, the extreme limitedness of a child's perspective. Its protagonist's deeply adolescent assumption was that life will never change, that it goes nowhere. "An adult [Conroy wrote] recognizes petty problems for what they are and transcends them through his higher preoccupations, his goals—he moves on, as it were. A child has no choice but to accept the immediate experiences of his life at face value. He isn't moving on, he simply is."

The lack of a redemptive *telos*, the refusal to discern or impose a "story" upon often painful and difficult events, gave *Stop-Time* its pessimistic cast—the narrative structure is framed by an account of the grown-up Conroy driving wildly through the night, drunk, heading for a crash —but also its vivid and penetrating honesty. The various people who pass through young Frank's life have no function, no part in a larger story, because from Frank's point of view there is no larger story. People aren't there to teach Frank anything he wants to learn; they're simply there to be seen in all their mysterious and sometimes tedious particularity. As its title implies, *Stop-Time* relies for its success upon stuckness. The mode of the book is the trenchant skepticism of an exceedingly intelligent young person convinced he isn't going anywhere.

Body & Soul, on the other hand, exudes progress and higher preoccupations. Life, it insists, is indeed a story, a series of peaks and valleys along a gradually rising curve toward enlightenment. Surprisingly, Conroy seems to have grown up into an optimist; but it's an optimism that strains and creaks in its dogged insistence on making everything fit together, on delivering every last lesson and missing piece. Nowhere does it creak more loudly than in the novel's climactic scene, when the author maneuvers his hero, by now an internationally known concert pianist in his midtwenties, into an unwitting and coincidental reunion with his long-lost father—who turns out (surprise!) to be a jazz pianist in a London nightclub. The two musicians play together four-handed, setting the house on fire with their shared passion for jazz, Claude unaware of the true identity of the man next to him, yet inexplicably drawn to him....And so on. The scene has the sweetness of Hollywood product: "perfect" to the last detail.

Behind such sentimental manipulations lies a deep romanticism about creative genius and the nobility of art. *Body & Soul* is suffused by a longing for the purity of artistic devotion. It deals Claude (and the reader) chastening life lessons, ultimately offering salvation in a deep commitment to "the work." The tone of the novel is warm but powerfully earnest. "You're not a kid anymore," Weisfeld counsels Claude when the boy confesses bewilderment at the twelve-tone system of modern music. "You're on your way to becoming a well-educated young man, and we're getting into deep stuff here." The substitution of Schoenbergian atonality for the birds and the bees in a standard coming-of-age moment might be hilarious, were there any irony to it; as is, we are asked to accept it, and other such moments, straightforwardly. With its hopeful messagizing, its sprawling all-inclusivenss, its earnest profundity, *Body & Soul* reads like, well, a first novel: which, after all, it is. It's a good enough book, given what tends to get published. It just isn't a wonderful book. Harsh judgments are the reward for having once upon a time written a book a lot of people love. □

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WHO CARES FOR THE POOR?

UNFAITHFUL ANGELS
How Social Work Abandoned Its Mission
Harry Specht and Mark E. Courtney
The Free Press, $24.95, 300 pp.

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE
The Human Face of Poverty in America
Jonathan Freedman
Atheneum, $20, 245 pp.

Patricia A. O'Connell

These two new books examine social service programs in the United States and suggest means to improve delivery of such services to those who need them most.

Unfaithful Angels chronicles the history of social work, highlighting turn-of-the-century pioneers Jane Addams, founder of Chicago's Hull House, and Mary Richmond, a Charity Organization Society activist who wrote *Social Diagnosis*, a seminal study in social systems theory, behavioral analysis, and casework. The authors also investigate the antecedents to social work—patronage, piety, Poor Law, and philanthropy—and their impact on the development of the profession; in addition, they show how major events—the Industrial Revolution, both world wars, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement—influenced the practice of social work and its image in the eyes of the general public.

The historical foundation rendered here points up a disturbing trend in social work at this end of the twentieth century—the exodus of its practitioners from work with the poor, the homeless, and other disadvantaged populations, into private-practice psychotherapy with a basically middle-class clientele, "the worried well." The authors know whereof they speak: Specht is dean and professor of the School of Social Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley; Courtney trained as a clinical psychologist, but his interest in family and children's services led him to look to social work as a better solution to some problems. Both are appalled, and justifiably so, at statistics and facts such as these: Approximately 40 percent of the 140,000 members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) are engaged in private practice for some or all of their work week; two-thirds of the legislative priorities of NASW state chapters documented in a relatively recent study involved licensure or third-party payments; the Council on Social Work Education has developed standards for accrediting schools in the field with no requirements for course content on such seemingly vital subjects as the poor, the aged, dependent children, group or community work, the law, or publicly supported social services.

As the authors point out, our tax dollars support social work education, which seems increasingly oriented to training students for private-practice psychotherapy, and our insurance plans pay for the middle class to be counseled for relatively minor problems. Perhaps most disquieting is the fundamental issue of the *social good vis-à-vis* the middle-class infatuation with buzzwords like *co-dependence*, *inner child*, and *addictive personality*, which may ultimately manifest not a quest for even self-improvement (never mind community improvement) but rather selfishness and avoidance of responsibility. The truly needy often have little or no access to psychotherapy, nor is there any indication that psychotherapy would solve their most pressing problems. However, Specht and Courtney do mention an alliance of strange bedfellows who believe psychotherapy may remedy all of our ills (personal and collective): neoconservatives, who hold the individual to blame

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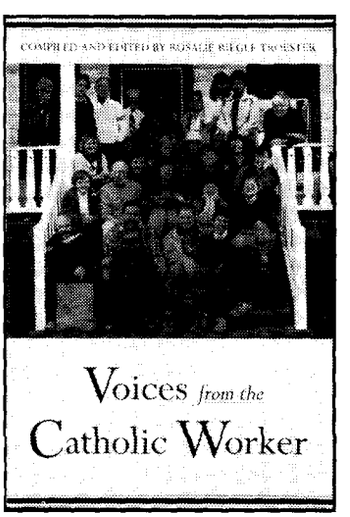

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for lack of financial, educational, and social success; and—seemingly at the other end of the ideological spectrum—New Age members of the human potential movement.

In their sometimes heavyhanded manner, the *Unfaithful Angels* authors advocate that social workers should beat a quick retreat from the private practice of psychotherapy and return to their original mission. They further promote a community-oriented approach to social work with services available to all (not just the poor), based in an easy-to-reach center, and accountable to the residents of an area. In fact, the Berkeley schools of social work and public health have already established a Center for Integrated Services for Families and Neighborhoods to help local communities contemplating such an approach. Children and the elderly, those with the greatest need for social services but the least degree of mobility for obtaining them at faraway sites, would benefit most from neighborhood centers, which would also function as volunteer bureaus, citizens' advice and education nuclei, and self-help group meeting places. Specht and Courtney recommend that the Department of Health and Human Services administer such centers, with state and county equivalents to the federal overseers.

While it is enticing to believe that such centers would deliver assistance in the quickest, easiest, and least expensive way possible—as is the objective of social work, the authors contend—most readers, even those sympathetic to the argument here, would like to see concrete examples of this concept at work. How would a center in Peoria, Illinois, compare with one in the South Bronx? Is a neighborhood measured in terms of population, political division, or geographic size? Who ultimately determines service priorities and funding allocations, the neighborhoods or the government? Financing is a particularly murky issue here.

However, the general point advanced by Specht and Courtney is quite well taken: "Social workers should not be secular priests in the church of individual repair, they should be caretakers of the conscience of the community. They should not ask, 'Does it feel good to *you*?' They should help communities create good."

Many of the people, both clients and caregivers, whose lives are discussed in Jonathan Freedman's *From Cradle to Grave* are participants in community-oriented programs that Specht and Courtney would applaud. Some of the most effective programs, in fact, began outside so-called usual channels because conventional government bureaucracies were unaware of or unresponsive to local needs. Freedman, a San Diego-based, Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, has taken an interesting approach in structuring his book, which is much more personal than *Unfaithful Angels*: he chronicles the life span from prenatal care for babies to old age as experienced by various Americans in need across the country. Freedman states that his goal was to learn "how people cope with the most destructive deprivations, and see how some manage to survive, grow, and thrive."

Programs that he describes include the Center for Family Life, which started sixteen years ago in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn as a modest attempt by Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine to transform poor, gang-ridden streets into a real community; the center now provides full-time child care, after-school programs, counseling, food, health and foster care, and employment services free of charge to anyone in the neighborhood with teen-agers mentoring younger children and families becoming participants in progress. Services that aid displaced autoworkers, unwed mothers in the Pacific Northwest, and nursing-home residents in the Boston area are also featured.

"Dr. Runyon, many of us feel you're a disgrace to the whole human potential movement."

As did Specht and Courtney, Freedman cites depressing figures: Social workers in Los Angeles County's Department of Children's Services often have caseloads of seventy-five or more (an appalling condition that may drive some into private practice, which is exactly where the *Unfaithful Angels* authors claim they don't belong); the United States holds twenty-second place in world infant mortality ratings; an estimated 60 percent of children born in 1987 will grow up in broken homes. But Freedman also offers a theoretical plan for overhauling social services and health care, to provide a railing for Americans to grasp as they climb from birth through maturity so that they won't have to "fall all the way down the stairs before they get help." As with Specht and Courtney, proposed financial arrangements for this plan seem quite hazy (although Freedman might have more to say on the issue after the fate of President Bill Clinton's health-care reform bill is decided).

From Cradle to Grave offers photographs of some of the people the author discusses, as well as follow-up synopses of their successes and disappointments after he initially encountered them. A very frustrating aspect of this book is the absence of notes (except for a few footnotes scattered throughout the text) and lack of resource information about the particular programs mentioned here. Such information might have been helpful to readers. This is, after all, advocacy literature, and Freedman is not only a beautiful prose stylist but also a very persuasive writer. Motivated readers might wish to pay him the ultimate compliment of beginning their own social service programs after seeking advice on how to go about it from the folks mentioned in his book, or they might know someone who could use the services of these very programs. Or they might wish to donate time and/or money to Families First, LIFE, Options for Recovery, etc. If one is to judge from the straitened circumstances of the programs Freedman has documented in *From Cradle to Grave*, a single volunteer, contribution, or concerned public official may spell the difference between survival and termination for many of them. □

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

sumption in your thinking is found in the analogy used to ground your conviction that the new "long-term, fundamental economic shakedown is well underway." You compared this economic movement to that of "huge tectonic plates" whose shifting is "unrelenting and irreversible."

This kind of analogy tends to hinder reflection and action. Unlike the shifting of geological plates, world economic shifts are based not on nature but on human decisions open to human questioning. These may be unrelenting but they are not irreversible. As the decisions of particular people, they can be questioned, contested, and blocked, especially by national governments. Considering the misery big capital has inflicted on many U.S. workers over the past fifteen years by shifting operations to exploit cheaper labor, I'd say the workings of the economic system must be questioned. Industry's commitment appears to be solely to investors and not to workers.

Commonweal of course recognizes these problems, as is clear in your proposal that U.S. firms be taxed on relocating production to places like Mexico, and that the money be used for job re-training. I think the tax should be so massive that firms will think several times before moving and, further, that some relocation penalties should go directly into the pockets of displaced workers. I also think NAFTA should be passed only after such procedures are solidly in place in the U.S.

MICHAEL WARREN

McConnell the nihilist

Bay Shore, N.Y.

To the Editors: I wish that *Commonweal* did not see fit to provide a forum for the ego of Frank McConnell. Mr. McConnell, in his efforts to prove to the world that a serious Catholic can be just as hip as anyone else, is spreading the gospel of nihilism very effectively in his rave defense of "NYPD Blue" ["Smart, Hip, and Real," October 8]. I have not seen the show because I stopped watching TV completely five years ago, nor do I consider myself a supporter of Rev. Donald Wildmon, although I was ashamed of McConnell's snide rib-nudging about the American Family Association—this is political correctness at its worst, and cowardly. Exactly what is wrong about what Wildmon is doing? He is exercising his right not to watch a show and trying to persuade others to join in his refusal.

I object to reading in *Commonweal* the same sentimental glorification of big-city misery and alienation that I stopped reading mainstream publications in order to avoid. As long as putative critics—and educated Catholic ones at that!—fall for the old line that only the ugliest things are true, we will have no defense against the seductions of nihilism. I for one, a New York City dweller for thirty years and an auxiliary police officer for five, an admirer of cops in general and a former "Hill Street Blues" addict, don't believe it for a minute. Stephen Bochco is peddling ugliness for fame and money and calling it truth, and McConnell is urging us all to

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buy it, or at least not to knock it till we've tried it. LINDA A. MORROW

McConnell the hysteric

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: Re: Frank McConnell's near-hysterical admiration for "NYPD Blue," with its violence, profanity, and nudity. I ask two questions: Where is the line in the sand to be drawn? And will it be McConnell who draws the line?

CHARLES C. GALLAGHER

McConnell the Easterner

Manitou Springs, Colo.

To the Editors: Even though my gut tells me that the plethora of violence on TV is an influence for evil in some people, I agree with much of Frank McConnell's review of "NYPD Blue." But just to be persnickety, the show airs at 9 P.M., not 10 P.M., in the Mountain Time Zone. Were I not a thirty-three-year resident of New York City, now relocated to Colorado, I'd be tempted to think that some New Yorkers believe that "nationwide" means everything east of the Hudson River. BOB ENNIS

McConnell the liberal

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: For years my liberal Catholic friends have told me that it is absolutely inaccurate to say that liberal Catholics in any way support the rank sexuality, profanity, and violence that mark contemporary television and movie fare. The next time they make this lame argument, I will introduce them to Frank McConnell. For McConnell the worst thing about "NYPD Blue" is not the rank sexuality, profanity, and violence, it's the show's critics.

One wonders just how depraved TV must get before McConnell objects. In any event, he did a public service by showing what passes muster with liberal Catholics in the 1990s. WILLIAM A. DONOHUE

The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

The columnist replies:

As Jack Benny used to say, *Well!*

Guys: It's a show. You don't have to watch it. In fact, none of your letters indicates that you have watched it. Instead, you repeat the tired litany of "rank sexuality, profanity, and violence" which Donald Wildmon's people have promulgated. And you, Ms. Morrow, even take pride in asserting that you haven't watched it and won't: odd qualifications, you must admit, for a responsible critique.

I repeat my point, which was also Milton's in *Areopagitica*. The moral choice to watch or not watch, read or not read, is yours. And it is wrong to deny others that same moral choice, whether by burning books or terrorizing advertisers *before the show can even be seen and judged.* FRANK MCCONNELL

From the editors: Mr. Ennis: As everyone knows, Santa Barbara, California—where Frank McConnell watches "NYPD Blue" on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M.—is a nation's width apart from New York, but is spiritually east of the Hudson.

Mr. Donohue: Just to confuse you on the matter of liberal Catholics: two editors watched "NYPD Blue," one of us liked it, the other didn't. Neither found the show up to Frank McConnell's enthusiastic report.

Furthermore, the editors think that the right of free speech, much loved by liberals, applies with full force to Donald Wildmon's efforts at advertising boycotts and letter-writing campaigns, and that his campaigns are fueled by the same agonistic instincts that bring us all together here on the Correspondence pages. Bottom line: we think McConnell is wrong about Wildmon, and that Wildmon overstates his case against "NYPD Blue."

Finally, Mr. Donohue, we wonder if the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, which styles itself an anti-defamation effort on behalf of Catholics, might want to rethink his stereotypical and just-at-the-edge-of defamatory views about liberal Catholics. After all, if you're going to defend Catholics, you've got to defend all of us!

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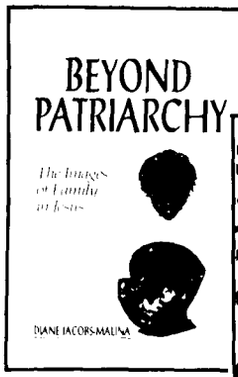

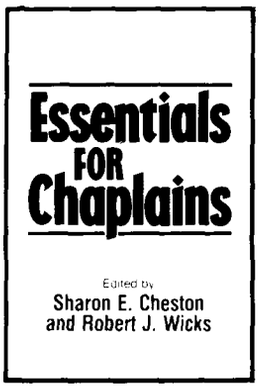

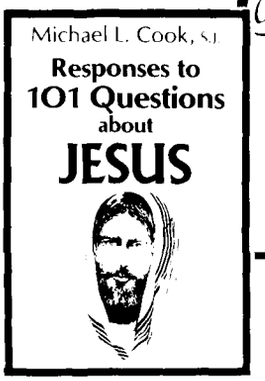

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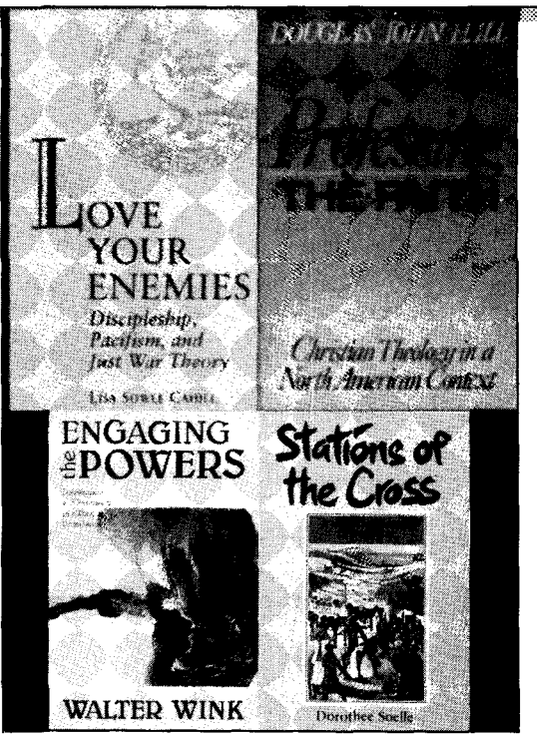

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